(CONTINUED)

XX.—THE ROMANCE

BY PETER BURKE,

XXI.—ADELE.

XXII.—STUDIES

AUTHOR OF

XXIII.—GRAVE

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BY E.C.

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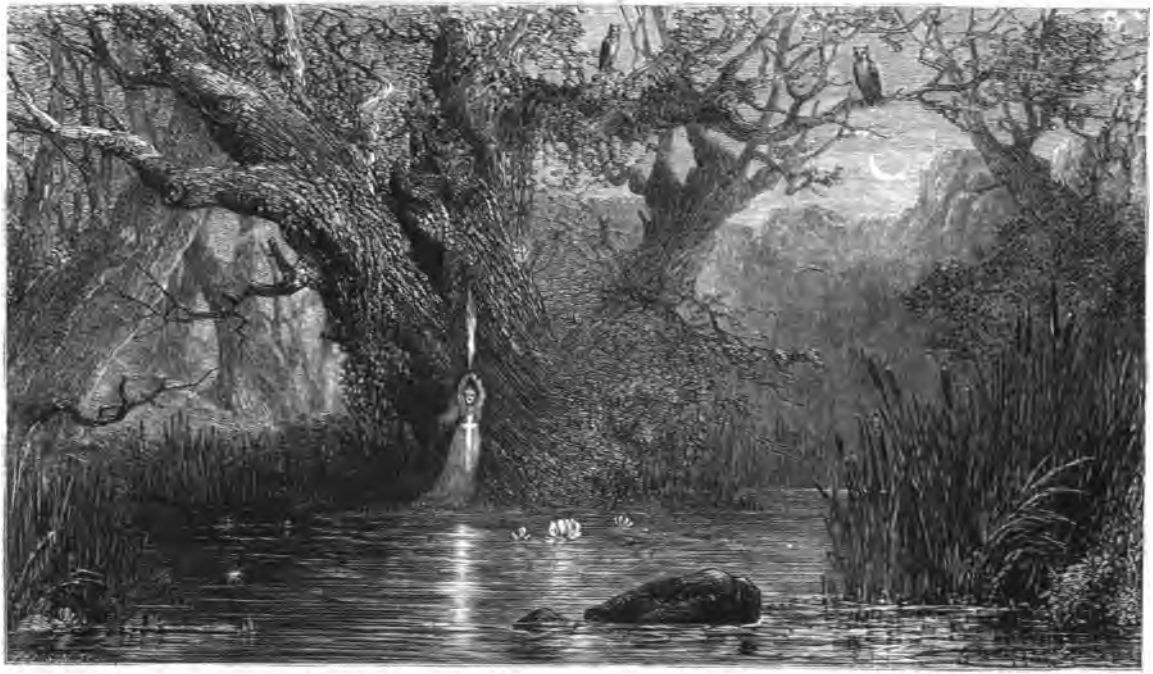
AND SAUTE.

MISTRAKE.

FAIRY FANCIES.



AIRY FAN[illegible]

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LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, [illegible]
13 GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
[illegible]

for me; creep into your snug corner in the coach, and greet the stout gentleman politely from me. But to-morrow, when you get home to your parents and sisters, and your funny little brother, do not quite forget me in the midst of your happiness.'

'Dear Walter,' said the other, laying both hands on his friend's shoulder, and looking him sorrowfully in the face, 'I must pass four whole weeks without you! But on the journey back, on the last Monday in July, we will meet once more at the little inn in the forest.'

'If you wish it; but I think it would be still better to meet up here. You must leave the coach before it reaches the forest inn, close to the Weissbach's waterfall, and strike into the footpath to the left of the waterfall, where the road leads upwards; then you will arrive here long before the coach. And here you will find me, and I know my father will accompany me; and we will bring you juicy pears out of our garden, and almond ring-cakes that old Bridget will make.'

The cheerful sound of a post-horn had ac-

companied the last words; and now the steps of horses, and the lumbering of the wheels of a heavy carriage, were heard in the forest behind the speakers. Yet one more warm shake of the hands, another farewell and 'God bless you!' and one retraced his steps into the fir-wood to join the carriage, while the other, breaking through the bushes below him, sprang down a gigantic flight of steps, of Nature's forming, and gained the well-known but little-trodden path. Stepping between high perpendicular rocks, he soon became the travelling companion of a chattering mountain torrent, which, having brilliantly, but shyly, like a small lizard, jumped out from beneath the rocks, increased in strength and boldness as it ran on.

The late rains had made the brook so unruly and boisterous that the boy could scarcely recognise the well-known murmuring voice of his old playfellow, and could not even keep pace with the impetuous current of its swollen waters.

Below, where falling from a high cliff it fluttered its transparent veil over the Schwarz-

bach, it had far overflowed the edges of the green cliff basin, and Walter found that he had to pick his steps upon wet stones which jutted out from the rocks, and so pass out by the gateway which Nature had formed in them. Without, the water had completely torn up the road which led into the fields. The brook was far too much swollen to allow him to cross it by the well-known stepping-stones. He wandered for some distance along the banks, but at last made up his mind to keep to the left in the forest, and then to cross the Schwarzbach by the stone bridge at Nordingen.

The pathway which he now chose was longer round, and his father had always forbidden him to go there alone at evening time; for the forest had swampy spots of fathomless depths, which would betray a stranger or unwary traveller into great danger. To-day, however, there was no choice; Walter knew the footpath so well, and also, since his father had last interdicted his going that way, he had grown two years older. Even his father would have made no objection had he been on the spot.

So he pursued the small footpath, which, leaving the brook, carried him deeper into the forest. The excitement of the last few days, which had effectually chased all sleep from his eyes, and which had prompted him so hastily to run down the narrow ravine roadway, up the mountain, and into a race with the rapid Schwarzbach, gave way by degrees to the more softening calm of the forest. Even Walter himself was scarcely conscious how tired he was, as he walked slowly under the trees and thought of the many wanderings which he had had here with his father, and recalled the old stories which had been related of these parts of the forest. A grey-haired Jäger, who belonged to those left by the old family, and who still lived in the Manor-house, had related to him the most wonderful things. The boy suddenly remembered that old Bridget had told him that he was a Sunday child, that he had been born on a Sunday morning, just as the bells were chiming, and therefore that he would see more curious and marvellous things in the world than most other Christian beings with two eyes. He had asked

his father at that time what was the peculiar privilege of a Sunday child who had been born, as he had, under the church chimes, and his father had answered that there was a peculiarly beautiful privilege for such a child. To him the dear church bells chimed a soul's greeting at his birth. When God the Lord called His own people together by the voice of bells, it was to bestow upon them grace and blessing; and his dear mother had also taken the holy peal as a promised blessing, as she held her little new-born son in her arms. With fervent prayers she thanked God for the little one that He had sent her; and she vowed, with earnestness and truth, to watch over him and bring him up in the will of God. That beloved mother was no longer here, but he himself was old enough to know God's will; and, if he trained himself early to revere this holy will, to receive thankfully and gladly the many mercies of God, then the time would arrive when he would see more and grander things than other men who slept their lives away, and were not wakened by the voices of bells. His father had also taken him into

his room, where hung the large, beautiful picture of his dead mother, and had there told him many loving stories of her; how angelical she was, the joy and love of all who knew her, and how devotedly she had loved her little Walter. When she suffered the bitterest griefs (and the poor mother had had many and heavy ones to endure), she forgot them all when her child was brought into her room. With him she would laugh and play, and seem to become once more a child. Even her last remnant of strength she had given for him, so that she might lead his steps, and be the first to guide him. And when she died in a foreign land—when, in the death hour, all earthly cares and sorrows had passed from her—when even she had conquered the bitter pain of parting from her boy—then, in that solemn hour, had she whispered with a holy smile that she heard the church bells. The same chimes which had sounded when her Walter was born—these morning bells now announced to her the breaking of a new day.

The young wanderer had become very thoughtful; his memory had roamed far back

to bygone times; and as in those past days, so now, he tormented his brain with a thousand unanswered questions, with anxious, dark conjectures and ideas about the unknown grave of his young, early-lost mother, whose fate was shrouded from him by darkness. His father and old Bridget, who only could have given him any information, refused to answer all his inquiries; and when he pressed them with eager questions, they had tried to pacify him by putting him off to a later time, when he would be more advanced in intelligence. They had told him anecdotes and slight stories of her goodness of heart and self-sacrifice; of her humble simplicity and affectionate care for others; and while, by such communications, they had unintentionally fanned the flame of the childish natural love of the fiery boy into a fanciful enthusiastic veneration, yet had they purposely or accidentally omitted to give a firm background to the sacred picture of the holy saint which they had placed in the shrine of his heart. The searching eye of the orphan son endeavoured in vain to image his lost mother from the world of shadows and of

misty, fantastic figures, or to gain clear distinct ideas of her earthly life. A long, incurable illness had brought the young mother to her early grave; but when his father alluded to the sad life that she had endured, when the faithful old Bridget shed quiet tears, which ran over her wrinkled cheeks and fell on her folded hands, Walter felt, with an overpowering conviction, that more than the mere bodily pain of a sick person was alluded to. His mother had not been happy!—good and angelic—beloved—and in death revered as a saint—but unhappy while on earth—unhappy? and yet had she not had his father? this impersonification of all imaginable perfection, and her little Walter also, whom she had loved so dearly? Here lay the great riddle of life to the poor child, the riddle to elucidate which he would have given years of his youth! Once, when he had begged and importuned old Bridget with impetuous questions, she had implored him with tears not to try to induce her to become disobedient and faithless to her good master. With such answers all his questions were put on one side, or stopped suddenly. The

commands of his father were sacred to Walter; he conceived a deep, respectful feeling for that mystery of the past which was also so full of sorrow for the beloved father. But how would it be now when he was returning—so much older and so much more sedate—after such a long absence? Would his father now be more communicative? would he now consider him worthy to break before his eyes the seals of the past, and grant him an open insight into the former years of his parents?

Oppressed with these thoughts, Walter had wandered on under the dark shade of the forest, and had never noticed how the twilight had been gradually fading away—how the path suddenly sloped downwards for a short distance, as if the mountain had wished to push its last step into the valley. The trees here stood further apart, and Walter could look more freely around him.

Close before him at his feet lay a fine green meadow, surrounded by forest-trees, and by its side a quiet reed-pond stretched in a line towards the west, where it disappeared into the

forest; and there, where the Elsenbach and the tilled land meet, the Schwarzbach grants it a passage through its quiet waters. Only a small portion of its smooth water-mirror is disturbed by the wild brook. The little waves which it flings about, quickly gliding on, break at both sides on the roots of the trees on the bank, or they whirl timidly a little further over the cool surface of the water, until the reeds around catch them up and sing them soothingly to sleep. Here in the forest, where the scarcely trodden footpath winds zigzag downwards to the pond, lay the water, dark and dead calm. Small branches of the oak, which the thunderstorm had broken and thrown down, rested as motionless on the surface as the broad leaves and white star-blossoms of the water-lily. The tired evening wind had gone to rest with the sun; the torn cloud covering had again closed over and grown darker. Yet a few pale, gleaming streaks, reflected on their edges that dying, fading evening light. The air was sultry. The only sound that broke the stillness was the melancholy croaking of the toads, which had

given the pond its name. Walter knew the spot well, and had never entered it without a shudder. The green swamp of the turf was of the most luxuriant description, and was generally known by the name of 'The Haunted Meadow,' and also 'The Garden of Death.'

Many years ago a learned botanist, and since then a poor widow from the mountain, who had been picking up wood in the forest with her boy, had been drawn down and lost in this swamp. All kinds of mysterious spectres were said to haunt this spot. The learned gentleman who had met his death there was said to have been an utter heathen. He had never entered God's holy house, but had kept company with evil spirits, which still met together every night on his grave. When the country people had occasion to pass through the forest they carefully avoided this spot, and the narrow footpath which led along the edge of the swamp was very little trodden. In several places the rank growing grass and forest moss had covered all traces of it.

Walter knew no fear of the unknown wonders of the forest. Mystery had at all times a powerful

charm for him, and to-day the lonely spot wove its magic spells round the over-tired boy. It struck him that, in order effectually to surprise his father by his unexpected appearance, he must wait in the forest till it became perfectly dark. He did not wish to be seen from a distance as he approached the house—he thought it would be so charming to appear suddenly and unexpectedly. He would spare old Bridget's nerves, as she was weak and timid; but he would surprise his father, who always read or wrote till late in the evening in his room. He would creep up to him through the garden, and step in at the open window, as he had often done when a little child;—and here under the tall trees, where it was so pleasant, he would wait till the right moment came. He lay down on the slope under an aged maple. Pond and swamp rested silently side by side at his feet. The forest surrounded them with its green crown, and the high reeds, the ornaments of the water, had also stretched here and there long stems amongst the flowers of the meadow, as warning flags to travellers not to trust the treacherous

ground. Just below the resting-place of the boy the reeds had divided and left a clear view. The water here formed a small bay, into which the haunted meadow projected a little slip of land, which was clothed with meadow flowers and tender grasses, while on the other side the rocky slope was overgrown with moss, amongst which the wild blackberry hung its branches down into the water. Here the brook had become the enclosed world of a water-lily, which to-day had unfolded its first bud under the influence of the genial rain-shower. The young blossom had not yet lived one night in the forest. She rested calmly on her green stem, floating on the surface of the pond, and glanced wonderingly and expectantly out into the twilight. Distant lightnings glanced through the tree-tops at long intervals. On the point of the small promontory stood an old lightning-struck oak-tree. Its two remaining charred and blackened branches stretching over the pond made it appear in the twilight like a gigantic magician, in a long trailing robe, walking over the water and performing magic incantations with outstretched, meagre arms.

Behind him, over the swamp, swept solemn processions of misty forms, which seemed often to stand still, or to circle ghost-like together, when the slumbering night-wind awoke and drew a deep breath, or when the reeds sighed shiveringly together.

A grasshopper sang its evening song; and the cry of the screech-owl sounded through the thicket. Walter rested, his head leaning on his hand, while his glance followed dreamily the mist-forms on the moor, and his thoughts floated and rambled like the sweeping fogs. The boy's eyelids closed; the straw hat rolled from his curly hair; and the tired, heavy head sank on the moss-covered root of the tree. Louder and more melancholy croaked the toads in the pond; more anxiously cried the screech-owl through the forest. The night-wind roused itself, and violently shook the tops of the trees. It swept cold over the hot forehead of the sleeper; but the boy heard and felt nothing. He lay in deep sleep, and the night-wind went once more to rest, while the trees stood still as before. The summer night had spread its darkest veil over

the forest, over the haunted meadow, and over the toad-pond. Now and then distant sounds were wafted through the air—single—double—more following in succession. The small church of Nordingen—the old grey beacon of eternity—reckoned from its tower the passing hours and quarters, and caused by day and night the monotonous sermon of the fleetness of time to sound into the valley below. In daylight, in the throng of life, its voice speaks to most men only of earthly things. Exhorting and urging, it strikes on the ear of the industrious labourers and weavers of the neighbourhood. It sends them to work, and calls them to their frugal meals and to their evening rest. But at night, on quiet beds, what says then the old clock? The happy, the healthy, who are wrapped in peaceful sleep, do not hear its voice; but those who from bodily or mental pain cannot close their eyes, in whose feeble limbs sickness burns, to whose hearts sorrow and care or a remorseful conscience do not allow any rest,—what to these do the hours strike? Are they hard milestones, on which they sighingly reckon

how short pleasure and joy have been, and how long through thorns and rocky ways the torments of the rough path have already led? Do they know that one of these milestones, perhaps even the next, may be the frontier stone of the unknown land, to which they will pass when earthly pleasures and earthly cares are ended for ever? and do they draw shudderingly back from this boundary stone? Poor mortals! Happy only thou to whom that border land at the frontier stone is no dark unknown region, but the bright land of promise! Happy also art thou, when the anguish of sickness quivers through thee; when care and trouble, even when the smart of sin, gnaws at thy heart! Thou knowest then what thy hope is. Thou feelest at the call of the hour the finger of God, which also directs thy insignificant human life, counts thy pulse-beats, calms thy anxious throbbings, wipes the tears from thine eyes,—the finger of God, which is warningly raised when thou stumblest, and exhorts thee. Be watchful—be true—wait and hope!

Again the tower-clock struck from Nordingen;

twelve heavy strokes fell wearily out into the night. As the last sounded there rose in the forest a simultaneous rushing and buzzing, a whizzing and crackling, as if swarms of numberless beetles swept hither and thither, and as if the wind waged war with the summits of the gigantic old trees. It was not, however, the wind that was awakened, for the trees and bushes stood perfectly still; and of all the great host of insects which annually, till the feast of St. John, make their abode in the forest, as yet only a couple of loitering fireflies hung about for lack of better employment. They were dressed in their shining gala uniform, and were on their way home from a country ball, which the bee-queen had given in a garden in the forest. I fear they must have drunk a little too deeply of the elder-blossoms, as they staggered about in the darkness, and searched for their green tents under the bushes on the slope. Thousands of lives awoke in the forest. Like clouds of heavy mist arose a marvellous ringing and whispering from the damp ground. In the overhanging summer night a forest chattering

was audible to fine fairy ears throughout the land. Grasses and weeds opened their hearts and gossiped to each other over the hard day's work they had had, carrying rain-water since daybreak to give drink to gnarled old tree-roots and thirsty little mosses, which always insisted on having their share when oaks and elms had an extra feast. Water-carrying is a very troublesome day's work for slender field-pinks and quiet foxgloves, for weak heartsease and soft eyebright.

'Must we stay here yet in the late night, bent down and carrying heavy water-drops?' grumbled angrily the Wild Thyme-blossom. 'The least breath of air even does not take pity on us, to relieve us of our load, or to shake the heavy drops of water from us.'

Three tall, slender grass-stalks stood near, and shook their delicate heads disapprovingly. One of them murmured to the others,—

'Why should the small, stemless thyme-plants make such a disturbance and clamour, as if they alone suffered because all the winds that pass by do not wait on them? Just look once at us, and see how much more we have to bear.'

And the Grass-stalk drew itself up, and held tremblingly with feeble hands a heavy, bright, silver rain-drop high in the air. Its companions cried out together,—

'Look, look! ours are even yet larger!'

And as they all endeavoured to hold up their burdens, they shook and mingled together. Three heavy rain-drops rolled into one and fell down cold on the forehead of the sleeping boy.

Walter jumped up startled, rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, leant against the maple, and at last remained sitting on it. The night was no longer dark to him. With wonderfully sharpened intellect he understood the mysterious life of the midnight forest. The buzzing and humming round him had now become for him an intelligible language. Plants and beetles seemed like old friends. He listened entranced to their homely talk, and felt himself invigorated and refreshed, like a thirsty pilgrim towards whom a refreshing draught flows from a cool spring.

Walter's movements, as he awoke and placed himself in another position, startled out of his comfortable rest a respectable frog, who had been

contemplating his own reflection from between the broad leaves of a colt's-foot. Full of anxiety and fear, the innocent dreamer jumped away from the unwelcome neighbourhood of a never-before-seen man's boot, and flung himself head foremost into the bay, the water of which sprang up high, and, closing again, nearly swept over the white floating lily-blossom. The two fireflies had only recently discovered the young water-lily, and admiringly hovered round her. Now they officiously flew up to her, helped to shake the bright drops out of the white petals, and thus an acquaintance was commenced. A marvellously hoarse cough at this moment sounded through the bushes.

'Oh, good evening, Mr. Professor! we have not had this pleasure for a long time!' cried a Bat, which in crooked flight circled round the blasted oak-stem; and as the water-lily and fireflies looked round inquisitively, there glanced at them out of a thicket on the bank the brilliant eye-glasses of an old horned owl.

'So you have come in time to see the military manœuvres in the forest?' continued the Bat.

'But you have missed some, Mr. Professor! The May parade, which is just over, was exceedingly imposing. The May-beetle regiment have undoubtedly the best band in the whole army.'

'I do not trouble myself with parades and field manœuvres,' snorted impatiently the Horned Owl; 'I have come here into the mountains more to pursue my archæological studies. There ought to be many valuable Roman coins buried here, deep in the mountains, which would be worth finding. The fact is, I am engaged in a grand scientific journey, in the company and for the interests of my niece, the young owlet. The dear child has the prospect of a rich inheritance, but they will dispute her claim to it if she cannot prove clearly her direct descent from the owl of Minerva. The genealogy is indeed no mere family tradition, and we go now to Italy and Greece, to collect old coins and family pictures, and to clear up important facts. Only judge for yourself, and look at that young lady. Observe the haughty bend of her beak,—the deeply thoughtful curve of her forehead. Oh! there flows noble blood under the feathers of that bird!'

The young owlet fluttered with faultless grace over the bushes, alighted near the speakers on the charred oak-stem, and greeted the bat with a condescending bend of the head.

'A rich heiress! and of good family!' whispered one of the Fireflies to his comrade.

'Yes, yes, an heiress, and of very old nobility —but may I kick ingloriously to death in the next spider's web, if she is not also an accomplished odious blue-stocking! It goes in the blood, you may be sure of it—I see it plainly in the way she holds her beak.'

And with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders, which made his bright shining epaulettes glitter through the dark night, the firefly wandered away, and paid his homage again to the quiet water-lily. He told her all about the grand court ball of the bee-queen; named to her all the beauties, till she was almost bewildered—the purple rose, the hundred-leaved rose, the pale melancholy tea-rose, the moss-rose, the joyous Burgundy rose, and the small coquettish rose de Meaux. He had great pleasure in chattering to the innocent young water-lily of all these un-

known court beauties. She truly was no blue-stocking, and had as yet seen nothing of the world, so his delight was great in witnessing her child-like astonishment, and in answering her *naïve* questions.

There is not a more simple education than that learnt under the water-mirror of a quiet reed-pond, above all when such a pond lies in the midst of the deep solitude of a thick forest, and embosomed in a retired mountain valley. The water-lily, which sprang from the cool soil, was indeed a child of nature. She knew nothing of the vain self-conceit of the garden flowers, and as the firefly could not understand why the lovely water-lily had not been invited to the ball of the bee-queen, he told her that he would take good care that such a mistake should be immediately rectified; but she shook her head, and observed that a pale, scentless water-flower like herself would not be allowed entrance into a blooming rose-garden. She should be frightened to death when she found herself sitting like the other roses amidst thorns and prickles on high waving stems; and when honey-bees and golden

rose-beetles swarmed round her with sweet speeches and sharp questions, she should not know what to answer them. The firefly explained, that at court colour and scent mattered nothing, for really there one never knew if the colour was real or not! At court only rank was thought of, and all roses* were well received there. He related to her how highly at this time two pale French beauties were prized—Madame Hardy and Madame Plantier; and most of all, a beautiful Southerner, the 'Centifolia unica,' which was even yet paler than she herself.

The young owlet on the oak-trunk had listened for some time to the conversation between the water-lily and the firefly, and found it singularly uninteresting. She generally found no conversation amusing which did not concern her, and, therefore, now thought it high time to interrupt and join in the talk of these two. She ridiculed the firefly because he had so heedlessly comprised the young water-lily in the wide-spread rose family, whereas it traced a clear

* In Germany water-lilies are called water-roses.

family lineage—in fact, could claim a relationship with a many-century-old Indian princess, who had only a few years previously come to Europe: she called herself the 'Victoria Regia.' 'Victoria Regia' was to the water-lily an entirely strange name. She pondered in her own mind over all her relations, known and unknown, counting over on her white petals her eight aunts and her seven-and-twenty cousins; but the 'Victoria Regia' was not amongst them. She inquired amongst the small blossoms that grew on the bank; but even the blue Forget-me-not itself (which always was allowed to have the best memory) could not remember to have seen any flower with so pompous a name. Now the vanity of the young water-lily had not been fully developed. She possessed, however, much more of that other inherited fault of woman—curiosity; and so, overcoming her repugnance to the clever old governess, the young owlet, she inquired further, and asked if she might hear more about this Princess Victoria. The young owlet then related quite a romantic story, telling how the 'Victoria Regia' owed her life in Europe to a

learned botanist who had made her acquaintance on a journey; how she could not survive the bitter cold of the northern climate unless the tenderest care was exerted to preserve her; and how, in order that her life might be prolonged in our regions, she was obliged to dwell in skilfully-constructed palaces, and draw her breath through tepid baths. The young owlet had not concluded her learned speech, when everyone's glance was arrested and turned to the haunted meadow, where there danced, on many places on the soft ground, small, light flames. They skipped and glittered flickeringly over the moor, or stood still and shook quiveringly to and fro; then brightly streamed up, danced nearer, and sank suddenly into the ground. On another spot they re-appeared, whirled round, twisted in circles over the points of the grasses, and then back to the pond and the little inlet.

'Oh! what is that? who are you?' asked tremblingly the Water-lily, and covered itself in affright with its white petals.

'Hurrah! a ballet-dancer!' cried the Firefly:

'a merry dancer through night and fog-mist, but not one of the corps de ballet of the forest opera —no cricket or grasshopper!'

'It must be a Hungarian ballet-dancer,' remarked the other Firefly; 'they have come into this country with the gipsies, and dance gladly in moonlight nights under the free open heavens. Will-o'-the-wisps, or Wandering Lights, I believe they are called.'

And now, again, a slender stream of flame slowly glittered up to the edge of the water. The Firefly drew his shining sword, and stretching it towards the flame, he stepped up to it and cried, with a commanding voice,—

'Stop, Will-o'-the-wisp! stop! Give password and countersign. Who are you?'

A light laugh was the only answer, and scornfully hissing, the flame sank in the ground.

'Oh, that is no living dancer!' whispered the alarmed Water-lily; 'that is a ghost-spirit!'

And now the flame appeared again on the edge of the moor, and remained with its feet fast in the water. Then the White Blossom in its anxiety cried out,—

'All good spirits praise the Lord!'

'In eternity, Amen!' answered the slight Flame as it stood firm and clear, and spoke further; 'I will willingly give answer and information who I am if I am properly asked.'

'Give information what a Will-'o-the-wisp is!' thought the listening boy under the maple, and drew himself yet nearer the edge of the pool. 'Shall I hear and gain information on a subject which no teacher knows?'

The young Owlet on the seared oak-stem, who had received a first-class modern education, now hopped, with derisive up-turned beak, a few twigs nearer, in order to hear better. She had only lately passed through a severe examination at the university, at which she had read a paper, two hours long, on electricity and water-gases, and would indeed a stupid Will-o'-the-wisp pretend to know more than she did? The firefly settled itself on the broad green leaves which floated near the water-lily, the better to attend; and, taking courage from him, the pale flower took heart, and asked the Wandering Light with soft, friendly voice,—

'Now please tell me who are you—you and your companions?'

'Ghosts of the dead are we—the spirits of extinguished lights! A short time on earth we have served men, and a sharp, violent death has torn us away before we could burn our wicks to their end, and could mingle with their ashes. Whoever suddenly loses his life through violence finds no rest in death; and we poor candles, whom men throw carelessly on the ground, or blow out, before our time is fulfilled, our spirits are doomed yet longer to rove restlessly, and with fallacious unearthly light to blind and lead astray. Such false spirits of light are we, I and my relations.'

'But have you really served men?' asked the Water-lily. 'Oh, relate to me how that was! I have never learnt service, and have never seen mankind.'

'You have never seen men!' sneered the Owlet; 'you will know well one day what men are.'

'Oh, but I know what men are! I know what the toad has told me of the skeleton of a

drowned man which has lain for many hundred years at the bottom of the pond. Ah! but it is sad what the toad told me. And once, a long, long time ago—I think it must be almost eight days—when I was yet a very small bud, and could not reach up here to the surface of the water-mirror, there glided a heavy dark shadow over the pond; the water rushed to and fro, and the toad said the shadow was a boat, and that there were men in it. How gladly I would have gazed upon them! I stretched up as high as I could, but I was yet too small. Once a laughing face, with bright, glancing eyes, bent down over the edge; but at the same time the rudder struck the water, and the ripples destroyed the beautiful picture almost in the same moment as it had appeared, the trembling water moving here and there; and before the reflection on its surface could be seen again the boat had passed. Oh, pray relate to me something about human life! I long so much to learn something new of it.'

'From me I fear you will learn nothing,' said the Wandering Light; 'and I have but very little

to relate to you: for my life was very short, and I am only able to tell you what I have myself experienced, or seen or heard. But mine is no instructive book-story, smooth and rounded, and closing with a useful moral,—mine is such a broken morsel of life, without beginning and without end; you will not know what to make of it.'

'Oh, only begin, dear good Wandering Light, only begin your story,' begged the Water-lily,—and the small Flame cleared its throat, blazed up yet brighter, and began,—

'I was a Christmas-light! Have you ever heard before of Christmas-lights?'

'Have we heard of them?' sneered the Owlet. 'One has not far to fly,—only to the next deep mountain valley, where stand young fir-trees on all the declivities. There in the evening twilights they chatter of future days, of all the magnificence which such fir-children may experience. I was really astonished yesterday to find how many of the young things down yonder had no dearer wish than to become Christmas-trees, to be dressed out with shining Christmas-lights and

coloured ornamental paper. They never reflect how dear the short pleasure will cost them, and that it will bring them death; of all this such young "wooden needles" think nothing.'

'They die, however, a beautiful death, do those young firs, when they have become Christmas-trees and have carried Christmas-lights,' said the Will-o'-the-wisp. 'We, Christmas-lights, belong to an extremely old devout brotherhood. Our order is founded on the bright Star which God the Lord first created to guide the wise men of the East to the birth-place of the Most Holy. So we beam out in the dark Christmas night, willing like that star to point out and remind mankind of the birthplace of salvation. But what do you know, night forest-rabble: owls—bats—trees and plants—and even *you*, bright fireflies, in your state uniforms; what do you know of the holy light that shone out of the darkness, and of the star which proclaimed it?'

'Oh!' said the Grasses on the banks, 'stars often fall down here into the pond. On clear nights, when the cloud-curtains are rolled up, they shimmer peacefully on the surface of the

water.' But they are distant and mysterious,—we cannot talk with them, and we could not understand their language, as it consists of nothing but light-giving.'

On the slope stood a powerful oak-tree. It had struck its roots deep into the rocks, and carried its majestic head still higher and prouder than the old maple, under which rested the young wanderer. On its stem a full-leaved Ivy had twined itself; it clung gently and trustfully to the strong tree, and bound its weak green arms round its rough bark. With tender hand it touched the small grasses at its feet, and asked softly,—

'You little Grasses, do you too want to understand the stars? An earnest strong will helps much to do so. Do not look only on the ground, little Grasses; raise yourselves up high, and if things here below appear bright and shining, and seem even above your comprehension, like the stars shining here in the water,—then raise up your eyes and look above, towards the real bright light, of which the shining you see here below is only the reflection. To wish to understand and

to look upwards! little Grasses, that clears the eyes and opens the portals of the understanding.'

'Portals of the understanding!' muttered Professor Owl: 'that Ivy babbles and pretends to talk wisely, but is yet a very bad philosopher.'

The Wandering Light however cried,—'Welcome, dear Ivy-spray! and do not mind what I said just now about the "night forest-rabble." I had not then recognised you.'

'But the story, Will-o'-the-wisp! what has become of your story?' sighed the Water-lily. And the Will-o'-the-wisp emitted several sparks, and began again as follows:—

'I was a Christmas-light on the branches of a fir-tree; in the middle of a large room my life began.'

'A fir-tree in a room?' whispered the Rush-blossom, and shook its head doubtingly.

'Certainly, in a room, a living green fir-tree! There was cold winter outside, and bright starry fresh nights; the forest was decked in ice and snow. The tender young wife, who ornamented the tree so tastefully with coloured wreaths of

sugar-work, raisins, almond-chains, and stars of many-coloured tinsels, would not certainly have ventured out into the snowy forest.'

'Was it planted with all its roots?' asked a Daisy on the edge of the pond.

'It was chopped down, torn from its roots; and, when the tree complained bitterly, no notice was taken of its grief. They raised it on a proud throne—so upright, so graceful it looked—just as if it had always grown there—as if it had never stood in the cool forest earth, nor drank the damp morning air. The gaping death-wound was deeply buried, and covered with the moss that ornamented the steps of its throne. At its feet lay the tokens of its majesty, honey-sweets and red and golden apples. My brother Christmas-lights sat each on his branch.'

'That must have been splendid,' cried a Fire-fly, 'if the others shone as brightly as you do!'

'Yes—later they did; but at first I burnt quite alone! From a wide far-spreading branch I gave light for the young wife as she busily passed backwards and forwards, placing gifts on the tables—such gifts as loving hearts give one

another at Christ's feast. Just under me on the nearest table lay children's clothes, and toys and picture-books. Here the young housewife had most to arrange. I now seem still to see her—to hear her speak. "Here above all," she said to the servant, who stood by admiring, "here above all everything must look bright and cheerful." Why did she dry her shining eyes as she placed a little frock of black woollen stuff, half hidden under a heap of toys and confectionary? "My hands would so gladly find something to do for my new child; but alas! I can only decorate its little clothes with gloomy black," said she, sighing. Restlessly and agitated she passed from one table to another, glanced often at the clock, and read again once more the often-perused letter. Tick-tick clinked the old time-piece, which sat in great self-complacency on a bright console, with its sharp gilt feet placed firmly on the block of black marble, and its round, full-moon face glancing out so unconcernedly under the old-fashioned embellished head-piece. It swung its pendulum as jauntily as if the ribbon of an order decorated its breast, or as if it did not signify

to it which hour it proclaimed with its rattling voice.'

'Such time-pieces are tedious old maids,' said the Bat, which often, in the gloom of the evening, fluttered by the houses of men, and looked in at the windows, and had there gathered experience: 'pedantic are they, and high and mighty. It is scarcely to be believed what a fuss men make with them: everywhere they ask advice of such "Aunt Tic-tacs;" and everywhere they must have a voice in everything; and that is called the best-managed household where all is ruled by them.'

'The young wife,' continued the Wandering Light, 'was also one of those who took the law from it, though she had no control over the self-willed old clock; her beseeching glance could not stop or hasten it for the shortest space. I knew not then what she wanted from the clock. I heard her talking with the servant, but their conversation was grave and sad. They did not speak of Christmas-eve, but of grievous fever and of death; of the sudden death of relations and of two orphan boys; of the master of the

house, who had hastened to the death-bed of the friend of his youth, and who to-day would return home. Ah! that thought brought back the bright gleam to the loving face of the young wife. How she rejoiced, after weeks of separation, at the thought of his return! What joy it would be! As she spoke of joy and happiness her lips smiled radiantly, and her glance wandered to the corner of the room, where joy and happiness lay embodied; where, under the hanging curtains of a cot, slept a small, sweet baby.'

'A human child?' asked the Water-lily.

'Yes, of course; a human child.'

'Oh, please tell me, how did it look?'

'Oh, it looked very charming! I shone down from my height on it, as the young mother stepped smilingly up to it, drew the curtains apart and bent over it. The head was turned towards me, resting on a snow-white pillow. The little mouth was half opened, the cheeks were flushed bright red from deep sleep. Deep, dark, silky lashes swept over them; and there were little fair curls peeping below the lace cap.

One small arm rested on the coverlet. The other, with firmly-closed hand, was thrown backwards, and rested under the head. It was indeed a lovely Christmas doll. The hand of the mother played near the round face, but she did not touch it; she only let the warm breath of the little sleeper play round her fingers. She smoothed the coverlet, folded the curtains together one over the other, and a soft "God bless you!" escaped from her lips.'

'Did you not see the eyes?' asked the Water-lily: 'the eyes are the main feature.'

'Oh, how tiresome you are!' said the young Owlet; and the Flame continued,—

'The eyes slept; and if the young mother had only once come in to look at her baby, I could never have told you anything about them. However, she came often; and at last, as she showed the servant how softly and soundly it slept, and as she quite cautiously and slowly—very slowly—opened the curtains, there shone from thence the light of two wide-open, deep blue stars. The little limbs stretched themselves out, and the small mouth began to laugh. I

heard a clear, happy sound of ringing joy from the mother's lips. "Is she not sweet? is she not precious?" murmured she, and joy-drops glistened in her eyes. Oh, what happiness for us Christmas-lights, to play and dance reflected in joyous human eyes! And more so if they are child's eyes, innocently, joyously beaming, and yet deeply earnest, like those of yonder cradled child.'

The Ivy-branch said, 'But a soul dwells in human eyes, and a light streams therefrom clearer and better than any candle-light, therefore that makes you Christmas-lights love to linger and gaze into them. Light draws to light; but in childhood's eyes there beams the purest light. Very sacred it is when children's eyes yet lighten a grey head, and children's joy beats yet in the heart of an old man.'

The Owl hooted a long angry tone, shook its head scornfully, and moved its sharp claws impatiently on the large stone where it had taken its seat.

The Wandering Light related further how the cracking of a whip, the rolling of a carriage, and

the barking of dogs had sounded from the courtyard. The lady ran to the window, and the maid to the door, crying out, 'The master, the master! there is the master!'

'The young wife,' said the Flame, 'took her child quickly out of its small cradle, wrapped it carefully in a warm shawl, and flew towards the door. But on the way she gave the baby to the servant, and said hastily, "No, no! you carry it! I must have both arms free to fold my new child in them." Over the bright floor she stepped out, the door closed, and I—I was alone—alone in the large room. With anxiety I perceived how deeply I had already burnt down; I was not half as tall as my darkened brothers near. Would, then, my sight and observation so soon, alas! come to an end? thought I, holding my breath, and pressing my flame close together to economise the wax. I put a dark cap of ash on my glowing wick; but it did not sit firmly, and fell from me on to the ground. Perhaps it would have burnt a hole in the carpet had not the maid returned and quickly stamped it out. An old servant also came in and

lighted the numerous candles on the chandelier and on the branches upon the walls. They sat straight and upright, were clothed in snow white, and looked haughtily down upon us; but the turn of my brothers on the fir-boughs came also. Then I saw the tree glancing and shining in the great mirror, as if it were clothed in a dazzling robe of gold and sunshine; and again the servant and maid spoke of a boy: the poor boy, they said, how noble and refined-looking he was! He appeared, too, very amiable and good. Yes, he must be good; otherwise, the meek, quiet woman who was his nurse would rather have gone with the younger brother, who stood more in need of her care: but she had not been able to bear even the thought of parting from the elder one. So they talked; and when all was bright and ready the servants disappeared. Many steps sounded in the hall. In the next room was sung a beautiful hymn, and at last—at last—the door was thrown open.'

'Ah, I wish I had also been a fir-tree!' cried a small Thyme-blossom.

'Be quiet! do not interrupt!' chimed in from

all sides, and the Wandering Light continued,—'I saw the master and mistress on the threshold, followed by all the servants and household. I saw the master of the house still in his travelling-dress; he carried his little daughter; she crowed loud, and, with arms and feet beating the air, she was taken to the Christmas-tree. The young wife led a boy by the hand, clad in deep mourning. Full of kindliness, she looked down on him. The child had caught her right hand tightly in both his. His head, covered with curly, brown hair, was pressed against her arm; and he raised his eyes, full of trust and confidence, to her face. I flickered up above, and the wax fell in hot drops from my wick. I wished to see everything, to enjoy everything, and already I had grown so low. On one side, just over me, hung a long chain of gold paper, which carried a rosy apple. Oh, joy! a golden ladder for a small shining flame. I swung myself up link by link, the rounds of my ladder charred under my fiery feet. The apple rolled to the ground, and as I rejoicingly flickered upwards, and a splendid cloud of smoke rolled over my head, a quick hand reached

up to me. I was torn down, thrown on to the floor, and stamped under feet. I have no more to tell you—my life was over.'

'Oh, pity, pity!' cried the Water-lily; 'if you had only left that chain alone, the story could have been a little longer.'

'Every Wandering Light can relate a tale to you,' said the Will-o'-the-wisp in answer: 'ask some of the others;' and with this reply it fluttered away to the right and left. A Firefly flew up to it, and asked,—

'Did the honey-cakes on the Christmas-table tell you nothing about the bee-queen who gave a ball to-day? or nothing of her most gracious majesty's late grandmother, the high and most mighty deceased bee-queen? Honey-cakes generally used to stand in pretty confidential relation to the folks in the bee-hives.'

But the Flame had disappeared, or the night air had drunk it up, and the Firefly was obliged to return without an answer.

'Ask the other Wandering Light,' called out the young Owlet; and as the Water-lily wished much to hear more, the Firefly flew hither and

thither, and coaxed the restless lights to come to the brink and relate life's histories. A small flame, far fuller and brighter than the first, but with steady shine, glittered in slow circles on the background of the moor. It stopped often and hesitated, and seemed doubtful whether it should come to the brink or not. The Fire-flies became impatient, and called out in peremptory tone,—

'Come, Wandering Light, no airs here! Now come along and speak up; we want to hear your history.'

But they had reckoned without their host. The Flame drew itself haughtily up, threw a long stream of red, golden light, fine and erect as the stem of a rush-blossom, puffed its smoke contemptuously in the air, and instantly turned away. Not a word would ever firefly or owl have elicited from its pertinacious silence, had not the Water-lily, with a sweetly beseeching tone, gently begged it to remain, and said,—

'I am sure you are a most wonderful Will-o'-the-wisp; none of us can ever have heard such a wonderful story as yours.'

This speech seemed to soothe the Flame: it came back, drawing narrower circles; nearer—nearer—and nearer it came, and at last it stood still three steps from the bank.

'That is no friendly, dignified Christmas-light,' whispered the Bat, which hung with out-spread wings from the blasted oak-stem, on which the young owlet had taken its place. 'That light may most likely have burnt on some poor candlestick, and the snuffers have not punished it sufficiently.'

'I burnt on a candlestick! I allowed myself to be touched by a pair of snuffers!' screamed the Wandering Light, who happened to have remarkably fine ears. 'Oh, you simpleton! Under a white, dimly-shining dome have I dwelt. A transparent tower sheltered me against that arch enemy the draught of wind. On a long chain from the roof hung the lamp which carried me. There, seated on a soft wick, I held the highest place in the room. I allowed my light to shine over all who were in it, and had the complete rule.'

'*You* had the rule?' laughed the young Owl;

'why, you were nothing but a prisoner yourself, shut up in a tower!'

'No, indeed; no prison was my glass tower to me! Could I deem those prison walls which with a few hot breaths I could have split?' cried out the Wandering Light, and blew again a fine, red, golden fire-stream far up in the air—puff! puff!

'Ah! I don't like fire,' begged Miss Owl, and buried her beak under her wing. 'You give me a headache!'

The Flame emitted a little mocking crackle, and as the Water-lily asked him, 'Have you then burst your bright tower in pieces?' he continued, 'No; I left that alone. I have not spoiled my bright dwelling. Oh, I was far too cunning, for I should have caught my death in the draught. The storms of November roared round the house, howled in the chimney, rattled with the stove-door in the entrance-hall. The tired rain-elves rushed in wild flight over the house. With their wet veils they beat clattering at the window. Longingly they pressed themselves against the lighted panes of glass. They could not, however,

long keep their hold there; sliding down they fell splashing from the window-sills, down the steep walls, on to the stone flags in the court. The great tassel of the window-curtains even indulged in a little dance by itself. The draught of air played the music for it. It drew itself through the small cracks, and beat with impudent hands even on the door of the room. I only laughed in my safe room at all the wild frenzy. The house was strongly built of freestone. Sheltered round a corner, where the long side-wings touched the main building, lay securely the cosy apartment, streamed through and filled by my light. In a circle under me lay my silent kingdom,—I the sovereign,—I, with bright eyes, watching over all! My wild kindred in the iron stove, the fire-spark and the flickering flame, they have disliked me of old; they hate quiet lamp-shine, boast that they have light of their own, and pretend also with their distorted flickering to give light. Blood-red fire-shine they threw into the room—crackled and sparkled scornfully at me. They blazed warm through the whole space, trying even to reach

to me,—wherever I shone, there were they also. "Most illustrious Lamplight!" hissed the Flames in the stove; "Lamplight, are you still alive?"

'Living on oil
The poor wick dies;
Let the oil boil
The poor life flies.
Is your breath failing?
Is your light paling?
Pet! is your wick too long?
Sweet! sing your dying song!
Draught, mount up with a shout;
Blow it out! blow it out!'

Thus hissed the Flame, but I looked haughtily down upon them, and showed them my contempt by gently smoking.'

'As you were monarch in the room, you should have punished them!' cried out a Firefly.

'Nonsense! I scorned that,' said the Wandering Light; 'I was lord there. The wild flames were not trusted by the mistress of the house with her children; they had been placed under my protection before she left the room. The children, the joy and happiness of the house,

how anxiously I watched them, shed my rays carefully over them, and threw down a mild shine! The pretty little girl with the doll's cradle—I showed the child that her little Elizabeth had not yet gone to sleep. She rocked herself on her chair, and sang to it her lullaby song of black and white sheep again and again. At a round table in the centre of the room, just under me, sat the boy, books and school-things piled around him. I helped him to write his Greek exercises!'

'Oh, what a barbarous word!' sighed the Water-lily. 'Is it really not wrong to mention such words before a White-blossom?'

The young Owlet shook her wings contemptuously, and muttered something in her beak of prudery and childish nonsense, and the old forest trees shook their heads noisily. Even to them the expression was unknown, and they knew as little as the Water-lily what it meant; only the listening boy under the maple laughed out loud, clapped his hands joyfully, and shouted more gleefully than he had done the whole evening before. A Firefly asked,—

'Where on earth did you learn that difficult word, Wandering Light?'

'Whatever is formed of light and looks around need not learn. We lights know and understand what we shine upon—and I also especially! The boy wrote the extraordinary letters with hooks, tails, and small flags—I gave him light for it. He pronounced a word as the little girl came up to the table and looked into his book, wondering to herself, and asking what he was doing. Writing, she said, ought not to look like that. Then he explained to her that it was Greek, and he laughed that the little one wished to talk of writing which she did not understand.

'"I can already write a very little," said the child; "round O and ones I can make."

'"Oh, how clever you are!" laughed the boy; "perhaps you can also read already?" and he took a sheet of paper, wrote a word on it, and gave it back to the child.

'"That is my name!" she cried out, joyfully; "that is Hannah—just the same as you have written it in my pretty picture-book!"'

'Were they brother and sister?' asked the Rush-blossom.

'Judge for yourself,' said the Will-o'-the-wisp; 'they were like this: the boy tall and strong, earnest, dark-brown eyes,—an energetic fire in them,—the soft boyish lips firmly closed; the hair fell in rich waves over his forehead. The delicate girl was only half his size: a charming fairy child, like a snowdrop. The blue eyes shone, dancing with sweet roguishness, shaded by long dark lashes. Golden tresses of hair lay in heavy masses on the temples, and were tied together at the back of her head. Have you ever seen brother and sister so unlike?'

'Yes, indeed!' cried the Daisy-blossom. 'Fair and brown, that makes a charming pair.'

And the Bat asked, 'Did he not tease her? Brothers often like to torment their little sisters.'

'Nonsense!' said the Will-o'-the-wisp; 'the little girl played with some apples which the mother had brought in for the supper of the children. She rolled them over on the table, piled them in rows, and placed them in pairs, then formed them in circles. The boy glanced

smilingly at the child, but said nothing. At last she put all the apples into the basket, and pushed them into the middle of the table, as far as her small arms could reach. "We will eat them when you have finished your work, but not sooner—so mamma said," explained the child, and stood still waiting. She rested her round chin on both hands, and leant her arms on the table. How charming was the little head, the fine-shaped limbs, the tender, transparent features of the sweet face, and the golden-brown curls, which shone brightly in my full light! A warm glow played restlessly over them, like the flickering flame-shine. But the firelight did not reach the little one who sat in the centre of my circle of rays. No, no; there was another reflected light, the fresh young life that beat in its little heart, surrounding it as with a rose-glow. The impatient waiting and longing for the apples made the bright colour grow deeper and deeper. A cloud of ill-humour had already risen to the forehead, a tear gathered on the long eyelashes, but they held it and would not let it fall.

'"Ulrick, you are taking a long time," said the child. Then the boy looked up.'

'Ah!' said the Bat, 'now we are coming to it; now we shall see that he is a regular torment—a teasing brother. He will put the apples on the top of the highest cupboard, or else fill his pockets with them, and laugh at his little sister.'

'Bats, indeed, may know a great deal about how things go on in the world,' interrupted a Firefly; 'but when a Will-o'-the-wisp is hindered from continuing its story, especially in the very middle, why then I really should think——'

'Bats,' broke in snappishly the young Owl, 'have in general only dark, gloomy, twilight ideas of the world and men.'

'Ah, yes; *now* we understand!' said the Firefly, and bowed deeply to Miss Owl.

The Flame said, 'It is only to be deplored when winged night-things will interrupt and interfere with the narrative! The boy did quite otherwise. He was very sorry for the little one, and told her gently that to-day he had much to

do, therefore she had better eat her apples alone, and he would explain the reason why to the mother. The little one tried to force a smile, and said quickly,—

'"No, no; I will wait willingly. Did you think I could not wait, Ulrick?"

'The boy only answered by his peculiar bright smile, and taking a beautiful round apple out of the basket, he held it to her without a word. I also noticed how the kind boy looked at her full in the face with a meaning glance. Then I saw her cheeks grow redder and redder, till they shone as deeply as the glow on the apples. Even up to her forehead the scarlet glow mounted, and her head bent with shame lower and lower. The smooth red cheek of the apple carried deep wounds from two rows of sharp little teeth, which had buried themselves deep in it. The child explained she certainly had not intended to bite it; it was the most beautiful of all the apples, and she had only given it a kiss.

'"Oh! ho!" called out the boy, and laughed aloud; "then we must beware of your kisses. I

must tell father what sharp teeth his little girl has."

'"Oh, you are quite unkind now, Ulrick," interrupted the child, and sat herself down sulkily on her stool in a corner. The blustering wind howled through the chimney; the stove-door shook without intermission; with mad noise the wild flames drove in the stove and mixed themselves in all the talk: it made me quite hot to hear their foolish talk and chatter. However, it did the children no harm, as they did not understand the silly babbling. "Little Schabernack," the spark-spirit that dwells in pine-shavings and damp service-wood, and which loves, when it burns on open hearths or in chimneys, to jump out with puffs and claps to startle men, here also was loudest of all. Knick-knack—it jumped about in the stove, mocked at the little girl, and called her an "apple-pecker."

'But the wild shooting flame, with long red tongue, had already reached several times out of the open stove-door, and I looked anxiously at the children; for *she* really is dangerous. Bred by demons, she has no good feeling towards

mankind. At the martyr's stake, where poor victims died a painful death for their belief, has she rioted unchecked. Oh! it is fearful the tales she can relate!

'The little one had bent her head and gazed into the crackling fire. "How merry they are!" she whispered to herself. A sudden thought lighted up her eyes; quickly she ran to the table, took one apple after another, and gathered them all in her pinafore.

'"I am certainly not going to eat them, Ulrick; but please don't look round yet! you will be so pleased when you see."

'Then I saw the child busy at her baby-house cupboard, where the little service of china stood, and afterwards she returned to her little stool by the stove. She placed every apple on a small plate, and set them on the hot stove. So she stood watching the apples, and I watched the child herself. Oh, it was fortunate that I was there! The warmth of the stove, the pleasant watching, coloured her cheeks with deeper, brighter colour. Her long plaits of hair had become unfastened, and hung down her

shoulders. The white round arm was stretched out, and the little fingers touched the apples daintily to feel if they were hot.

'"Ho, ho! roasted apples!" cried little Mischief in the stove: "that won't do! Knick-knack! they shall burn up! they shall burst! piff and paff!" Long flames, wafted through the stove-door, shone on the feet of the child and on her dress.'

'Listen, Will-o'-the-wisp!' said a Firefly: 'now that the time was come for you to take care of your charges and warn the child, what did you do? you gracious, lighting sovereign of the room, and protector of the children!'

'Oh! I warned and crackled so much that my breath was fast going away! But, alas! when children will not listen! Once the boy looked sharply up at me and asked, "Are you turning idiotic, old Lamp? will you also pant and snuff in concert with the storm-wind? It is no business of yours—keep steady up above there, that I may write in peace!" The little one at the stove did not once turn to me. "Stretch out and singe her—singe her!" hissed the Flames.

"So precious and so fair! make her hot! scorch her black, and singe her! singe her!" hissed they ever stronger and louder, leaning themselves far out of the door of the stove. The draught of air drew them back. However, a violent gale of wind blustered complainingly down the chimney and drove wildly through the stove, so that the flames had to stoop and to escape into a corner. Then after, the banner flames, with the long red tongues, thrust themselves violently through the stove-door. They fastened on the light pinafore of the child, which hung fluttering from its shoulders—they seized eagerly the golden braids of hair—the little one shrieked a cry of agony. The boy jumped up, with a hollow shout of terror—he seized the burning child—tore quickly off its pinafore, and crushed the flames out. The braids of hair, which crackled and stirred with fire and sparks, he drew through his hands. A piece of the beautiful tresses, with a half-burnt bow that had fastened it, remained in them! He carried the little one to a large arm-chair, where she rested —he knelt before her, dried her tears, stroked

softly her arms and her neck, and spoke kindly comforting words, though heavy drops rolled over his deadly white cheeks. Then came also the parents; through the howling of the wind, their child's cry of agony had reached their ear. The little one sprang up to meet them, and threw herself into the mother's arms. "Dear, dear mamma, pray, pray do not be angry! I am only a little burnt—it does not hurt me much." The mother threw herself in the arm-chair, drew her child on to her lap, and examined the little clothes. The thick woollen stuff had saved her. A tiny small red spot on one shoulder, and one on the elbow, that was all the hurt. The little one chattered merrily, how lucky it was she had not had on her new pinafore—how Ulrick had put out the flames—how he had torn off her pinafore and stamped out the fire. The father took the boy tenderly in his arms, the mother with tears pressed his hand. She noticed he moved his hand painfully, saw that he buried it in his pocket, and as she drew it from thence, and looked at it, she grew deadly white. I saw from my radiant height how they took the boy away

—the mother tenderly passing her arm round his shoulders. The father carried his little daughter, and I was left in solitude. It made me wretched that I could afford no help—that the children had paid no attention to my warning. I had no more pleasure in my light, and I saw the wild flames, that had caused the mischief, one after another go to rest. The spark-spirit was also tired of sputtering, and only crackled indolently through the ashes; the wind alone howled as loudly as ever round the house. The rain-elves had passed away; moon-rays fell through torn clouds into the room. The young housemaid stepped in, closed the stove, and raising her hand up to my lamp, turned me in circles round, till I grew quite giddy, till—I—expired.'

'However, it was very magnificent that you were there, Wandering Light, and had the dominion,' scoffed a Firefly. The Wandering Light had, however, vanished.

'The poor boy!' sighed the Water-lily. 'Why should the cruel fire-flame have had a spite against him?'

A new Will-o'-the-wisp whirled in, pellucid as the others. As it burnt blue on the bank, flickering in circles, there rang a low singing through the air, monotonous and soft as a cradle lullaby.

'Who is singing there?' asked the Owl. 'What means that wailing? have we a nurse here?'

'Oh, leave it alone!' begged the Water-lily, and the little flame on the bank laughed brightly out, skipped and twisted itself, wished to speak, but yet for laughing and jumping could not articulate a word. 'A little Water-ghost I am,' it tittered at last; 'a little Water-ghost: sing to me; tell me I am welcome. Some sweet little rocky spring must have run to the ground, must have recognised me, and it sings to me my well-known song; that song that all spring-water spirits sing when I approach, when my hot breath blows upon them and brings them into agitation. Oh, happiness! what a lively life was mine: the life of the spirit-lamp under the singing-kettle! dancing in narrow space, always dancing to the same sweet melody—the sweet

melody that was humming and hissing over me amidst the blue, damp steam; and, meanwhile, I was peeping over the edge of the lamp, flickering and playing on the polished silver, reflecting back from the bright crystal, from coloured cups and the white damask-cloth of the table.

The room was a bright, agreeable apartment, with dark curtains, rich draperies, and part of the ceiling was handsomely gilt. On the grained oak-door shone the great round knobs; they seemed to think themselves lights. I nodded to them, I winked a greeting; they stared coldly back at me. Pah! ridiculous! nothing but bright, polished brass! How the varnished floor shone! how the flowers on the carpet smiled! Thus dwell happy mankind, and happy men love and foster the merry, comfortable house-spirit, the flame under the tea-kettle, that bubbles and skips with the flame's breath, with throbbing, hot, restless, beating pulse. They secure for it in the evening the centre place on the round, family table, and their hearts expand in cheerful, sociable conversation; in pleasant jokes, when

the hot steaming stream of water rushes bubbling out, when the song of the kettle sobs and chirrups, hums and twitters, and the little flame crackles and shoots out its forked tongue.'

'Stop! stop!' begged a Firefly. 'Wait a moment, you forked, flaring thing! My breath is taken away by your chattering and your jumping.'

'Have you no breath left?' laughed the Wandering Light; 'come and dance with me, you brilliant fellow! I have breath enough for us two. Come, come, be a gallant cavalier.'

Quickly as the wind it twirled up the bank, and came on to the rock where the old Owl sat,—

'Look! look! there are my old friends the brass knobs again!' cried it, rejoicingly, and stretched itself, sparkling and flickering, before the great, brilliant, spectacled eyes of the Professor. 'Pah! worthless brass! no light there! no life there!' The old bird, annoyed and dazzled, screeched loudly, shook its wings, and snapped with its beak at the saucy Wandering

Light; but it had already disappeared on the other side of the little bay, and the Ivy-spray called it entreatingly back.

'You must stay longer here, you wild thing, since you have burnt near mankind. What good men love and foster does not flicker about like a mad, teasing spirit through the night time, mocking and ridiculing respectable birds.'

'Tirum, larum! all that was long ago,' buzzed the Wandering Light; 'twenty years ago. Ha! ha! yes, twenty years or more; then the kettle sung its water-song—then I lived—then I burnt—but only one delightful evening!'

'Why was it such a delightful evening?' asked the small Grass.

'Because I was so happy. Hurrah! I and the people there! You should only have seen the joy in the glad faces that shone round the tea-table where I was; even the white face of the sick mother in the sofa corner bore the glory of a great joy; and how the father's eyes shone: he sat comfortably in the large arm-chair.'

'A father was there also?'

'Of course: he and she!'

'He and she! ah, only two!' sighed the Grass.

'Who was he, and who was she?' asked the Water-lily.

'Patience! patience! you must wait a bit. I saw much more—a young girl's face: deep blue, childlike eyes, full of mirth and fun; dark eye-lashes shaded them, but when she looked up, there was deep thought and earnest inquiry in the dark pupils.'

'She sat at your tea-table, then?'

'She sat also at my tea-table, and held a silver knife in her delicate hand, with which she spread butter on thin slices of bread which the young man had cut for her.'

'A young man! oh, pray, merry Will-o'-the-wisp, stand for a moment! A young man also! Who was the youth?'

'Ha! ha! you want to know, do you? This youth was the chief person in the scene, the joy of it all. Long, long he had been away, and to-day he had come home again—home from far travels. For him burnt the small, home-like flame under

the singing kettle, for him beat the hearts, for him beamed the eyes.'

'Tell us, how did he look and conduct himself?' said the young Owlet. 'It is of great consequence to know how the hero of a story deports himself.'

'Oh, stuff and nonsense!' cried the little Will-o'-the-wisp; 'it is quite immaterial for heroes. My dear youth never thought how he should behave himself; he sat and looked at the young girl; he watched her hands and gazed at her lovely face. When she walked lightly round the table he followed every step with his eyes, as earnestly and thoughtfully as if she were a sweet riddle which he was trying to read.'

'What is a riddle?' asked the Water-lily.

'Buds are riddles,' interrupted the Ivy-spray: 'first comes a little plant, quite small, wrapped up in itself, closely folded in curly, green leaves; then emerges the stem, higher and higher; and at last the full ornamental bud rocks itself on the slender stalk. You stand before it and ask, How will it look to-morrow as a full-bloom blossom; streaming in colours and splendour,

and breathing sweet perfume? Sunshine and warm summer air solve such a flower riddle.'

'Oh, bravo! bravo!' laughed the Flame, and flung happy, flickering greetings across to the Ivy-spray. 'You are right, she was like that: a beautiful girl-bud, in full spring-tide, growing and maturing. What would she be in full bloom! The riddle lighted up the young man's earnest dark eyes. Oh, I understood him well! He thought musingly of the fair young bud wrapped in the crisp leaves.'

'Was he a dreamer?' asked the young Owlet.

'No, indeed, far from that; he was a thinker,' said the Flame: 'extremely studious, and deeply read and intellectual. No book was too thick, or too old, or too grave for him. Nothing was too deeply concealed by a foreign language or a profound system; only the excellent young man did not know that *children wear out and outgrow their shoes.*'*

'Did he not know that proverb?' cried the Daisy, and held itself very erect.

* A saying in Germany.

'Yes,' laughed the Will-o'-the-wisp; 'whoever prefers to keep company with ancient fathers of the church, and wherever he goes first inquires after old books, and not after young people, how can he understand the difference which three or four years make in a little playfellow? Thoughts which linger and dwell about long bygone centuries are not quick enough to find their way in the charming present—a bright, glad present was it!' With this the Flame shook itself, and flickered, and sang, and skipped so wildly over the meadow, that the sparks fell in showers from it, and the Water-lily feared that it would not be able to relate any more. Professor Owl in the meanwhile opened his beak and said,—

'You ought to have been a student yourself, you merry Will-o'-the-wisp; you know so much of the character of your dear scholar, and speak of him as if he had been your own fellow-student who had vexed you with his seriousness.'

'Ha! ha! I a student? Far from it, Professor; though I should not be the first Will-o'-the-wisp who had achieved that distinction. But *I* to sit

on a bench in a school-room! *I* to write pot-hooks and hangers! Ha! ha! Ha! ha! The tea-table was my lecture-room, and all I know I obtained by listening to their discourse.'

'Relate to us all about your young student,' asked the Water-lily. 'Ah! tell us what he said.'

'Much, much; very much! more than I could relate to you. Of journeys; of England, whence he had only just returned from visiting a brother; of an uncle, and of an aunt, and of cousins.'

'But nothing more?' sighed the Water-lily, quite disappointed.

'Oh, yes! by-the-bye,' said the Flame, and recollected itself; 'a little maiden he spoke of, whom he had once known, and deeply, fondly loved: she had been a faithful playfellow to him. Many useful accomplishments he had taught her —to jump over a skipping-rope, to drive a hoop, to run on stilts; and when he took leave of her, she climbed up on the garden-bench to reach up to her tall brother: all this he related.'

'And where was this little maiden? where

was the garden, and where stood the bench?' cried the Grasses and Thyme together.

Ah! how quickly the Wandering Light was in the midst of them, seized the Grasses and Weeds by their fine leaves and shook them violently. It flamed up in a passion, 'Will you be quiet? will you wait? can you be quiet? How can I know everything? was I standing by them?'

The little Grasses and Weeds remarked that the Flame was not so really cross when it blazed up. They laughed, and said they wanted so much to hear about the little maiden.

'Be quiet! be quiet!' cried the Flame. 'Listen now to what the youth said; first, about the leave-taking on the garden-bench, then about the welcome home. He said he had expected to find the child—the little sister, but he saw a slender woman's figure, in long dress, holding grave discourse with the servants, sitting like a housewife, directing with the keys, and presiding here over cups and dishes at the tea-table. It all seemed so new, so strange, he could not help still hoping and expecting that the chrysalis

would burst, and his little sister flutter out and fly on to his knee.'

'The poor youth longed for his little sister,' said the Water-lily.

The Will-o'-the-wisp laughed. 'Believe him, believe him if it amuses you—but I did not believe him!—Longing makes pale,—the rogue! he seemed so thoroughly happy. The dark eyes danced in light and joy; his earnest mouth laughed, as if smiles were always ready; the young maiden jumped up quickly,—

'"She will not appear new and strange," cried she.'

'She? who? The little maiden of the garden-bench?'

'The little maiden, I mean, who spread the butter and bread. Ha! there she sat on the foot-stool by the mother, leaning her head with the rich tresses back on the sofa: she glanced roguishly into the youth's face and asked, "Am I thus not like the loved little Hannah of old times?"'

'Had she glittering, fair, golden hair?' asked quickly a Rush-blossom.

'Done in braided bows?' chimed in inquisitively the Daisy.

'He! he! he!' tittered the Will-o'-the-wisp, and danced in zigzags and circles. 'You are all quite wrong—nothing of the sort!—brown hair!—no bows!—yet wait—wait a little!' And the Flame waved itself to the right and the left, and buzzed slowly and monotonously, and then spoke:—

'Yes, indeed—now I remember how it was; the youth stroked the maiden's hair with his hand and thoughtfully said, "How dark your hair has grown! I should not have known it again. Only just at the tips and on the forehead there shines yet a little of the old golden gleam. It could not, however, have been real gold, it has kept its colour so badly."'

'False gold! how rude!' cried a Firefly. 'Did the child take offence at this speech?'

'Why should she?' cried the Will-o'-the-wisp; 'the dear young maiden begged that he would have more respect for a young lady's smooth-combed hair! such fine things were to be treated differently,—and saying this she took his hand

down and held it fast in both of hers. I bent over my small lamp-stand. I shone brightly over the diminutive thing they called a cream-pot, and I looked on the young man's hand. Oh! I saw a great—great scar—the sweet Hannah saw the mark also, and stroked her white fingers lightly down it. They stopped their merry laughter! She bent her forehead on his hand and said quite softly, "Poor dear Ulrick!—you have brought back with you that fearful scar. You must ever bear the mark of my misdoing, and yet you were my preserver from a dreadful death by fire, and should have had a kingly reward."'

'Ah!—ah!' said the Water-lily and the Reed-blossom together—'Preserver from death by fire!' and they both thought themselves so clever and sharp.

'I remember something about forked-flame tongues and fire burning!' cried the Daisy.

'Nonsense, child!' laughed the Will-o'-the-wisp. 'Do not chatter so; you disturb my thoughts. Everything is flickering—tumbling—dancing through my mind! Well, I suppose you want to know what further happened. The

father spoke;—(Ah! it is a confused tale! I have never even yet clearly understood it.)—" It was time to think of a reward for Ulrick. The dear Hannah might well hold the strong hand fast which had served so well, and she must really make up her mind what she would give Ulrick as a reward. She might take a few years to think it over. Perhaps a rare medal—a chain of honour—or at best a gold finger-ring," observed the father; it would only be suitable that the hand which had suffered so much for her should be by her rewarded.'

Professor Owl spoke: 'Was the daughter agreeable to this determination?'

The Wandering Light answered: 'The little one? Oh! the little one laughed heartily. "Oh, dear father, not gold and pearls for Ulrick!" She tossed her head and said knowingly, "When I have rings and chains I will keep them for myself, they would suit me better than the future most reverend bishop."

'Well, and the youth?' asked the Owl.

The Flame shivered impatiently. 'Be quiet! be quiet! you have already heard enough.

There is but little more to tell about the youth.

'As the father spoke of reward and gold rings he raised his head quickly, and glanced at him, a bright light in his expressive dark eyes—a question seemed to stand in them—doubt—hope—dreams of the future—Ah! what was he thinking of? The father smiled kindly on him: the mother gave a look which seemed to come straight from her heart, and her eyes shone dimly through tears. A hot blush mounted to the youth's forehead; silently he looked down; he did not even hear what the young maiden chatted gaily about—a wonderfully beautiful white glove which she would send him, trimmed with ribbon,—then the scar would be said good-bye to! Ah! I wish I could have understood only half of all they thought, felt, and chatted about. The kettle sat so heavily on my nose, humming, singing,—hot steam came hissing from it; blue clouds floated out from its spout. From the silver tea-pot the girl poured the dark golden-brown drink into the cups; boiling-hot perfumed flower-breaths

floated from it, and mixed with the other steam.'

'Boiling-hot flower-breaths!' screamed the small Thyme-blossom. 'Will-o'-the-wisp, you are telling a lie! flower-breath is ever cool and fresh!'

'Silence! silence!' whispered the Ivy-tendril: 'silence, little Thyme-blossom! do not let the Chamomile, or the Lime-tree, or the Elder-blossom hear you, and punish you for your forwardness.'

The Flame laughed loud and heartily, jumped and danced, and then resumed:—'Boiling-hot breath of Pekoe bloom floated from the china cups; the snow-white sugar, broken in small pieces, lay therein. Hot wafted the breath of the tea-blossom over the sugar and breathed softly the question, "Do not you think of your native country, and the glowing sunbeams of that fervid zone? Do you not remember how it scorched on the plains of sugar-canes, how the black hands of the Negroes cut the tall stems, the black hands which first attended you—first waited on your white sweetness?" The sugar remained, however,

perfectly still, and gave no answer—for the sugar knew quite well that the hot sunbeams of that fair, far-away tropical land, had never kissed his mother—his mother, who had been only a beet-root.'

'That you must prove, you over-wise Wandering Light,' snarled Professor Owl. 'A beet-root sugar mother!—that you must first prove!'

'Ha! ha! what is that to me?' cried the Flame. 'I am tired, and shall prove nothing. The kettle over me sang its wild melody—gurgling, rattling, and sobbing as if it would give up its last breath. The mother gave a sign: the maiden stepped quickly up—took the kettle off—bent over me: a warm breath drove across me. Ha! is my life departing? I enjoy my life; I will not die,—no, I will remain still longer; I am so happy in joyous company. I leant back and fought, flickering for my life. "Are you blowing on me, you lovely child? I fear not your rose-mouth. I blow back a kiss to you. Hush! stop! my breath is hotter than yours!" Ah, woe is me! the bold youth ap-

proached me also. It was no use, then, my flaring: he blew violently—blew me out!'

'Ah, ah!' sighed the Water-lily; 'if lights burn only to be extinguished, that seems a sad life.'

The Wandering Light swung itself yet a few times in circles round and round, made a bold spring in the air, and—splash! he fell into the pond and was extinguished. Again a light came over the haunted meadow—not far from the bank there trembled a small twilight flame: it glided slowly up, and stopped often, listening anxiously to every sound, to every light breath of air. A delicate voice wailed out, 'Oh, misery! the draught of air on the damp moor! I—a poor flame—I am wasting, I am blown away!' And the Light slipped down behind a mole-hill and concealed itself. 'That will never do!' cried a Firefly: 'we must see and hear you also, you small Wandering Light. You must come nearer.'

'Heaven have pity on me!' complained the Light. 'That draught of air! it is not to be borne. I cannot—I cannot come.'

'Oh, pray, you there, help him!' said the Water-lily to the Firefly; who instantly flew to the Wandering Light, and said he would defend him if he would only come with him.

'No, no!' cried the Flame, and threw itself shuddering still farther backwards. 'You have wings, with which you waft too much wind. If you will only go first and show me the way, then I will follow.'

And so it was arranged. The Firefly flew first and showed the way to the bank, and the trembling Flame followed cautiously. But when it arrived at the bank it fluttered upwards among the tall grasses, hovered over each waving stem, and sought to find a still safer, better place; and when it began to whisper with its weak, delicate voice, then the Water-lily called out she could not understand one word.

'Can you not swim?' asked the young Owlet.

'Yes, indeed, I can swim very well. I have always been swimming. But then I had a stiff life-belt of cardboard, and sat on a small polished chair, which had cork stoppers on all its three legs.'

'Here is a little boat for you, that will do just as well,' said the Owlet, and threw down from the branch on which it sat a dried acorn-cup.

'Imagine the tedious blue-stocking having for once had a clever idea!' said the Firefly to his comrade. It then broke itself a thin flower-stalk, seated itself in the floating acorn-cup, and rowed it dexterously to the shore. Then he left the little boat in the care of the blue forget-me-nots and flew a little distance up the bank, to where the trembling flame, with his comrade, already waited for him. Both the fireflies begged the flame to take courage, and showed it how safely it could glide down a blackberry spray into its little boat. Below the blue-eyed flower children helped him in a friendly way to embark, and at last there sat the light in the acorn-cup: but as the little boat began to rock it shrank trembling together. The fireflies had called a great moth, with its splendid wings of coloured velvet. The moth fluttered down above the water, made a gentle breeze with its wings, and drove the light bark before it. The fireflies flew

ahead; were merry, and tried by jokes and jests to make the Wandering Light laugh and banish its fright: but the little flame sat huddled up, crackled feebly and with fear, and would scarcely look up. Thus they floated it over the bay, and anchored it at last by the water-lily. The fire-flies bound the acorn-cup with a fine grass stalk, like a small boat, to one of the broad floating leaves, and on this it set itself down.

'Poor child!' said the Water-lily, 'now you are comfortably settled; but you have frightened yourself dreadfully!'

'I have not been accustomed to a sea-voyage,' said the little Flame, in its soft, timid voice. 'My polished chair was always quiet. Enclosed in a small, sad little room, have I lived my life — china walls and a green shade — no breath! no air! — a quiet sick-room — my pale light-circle burnt peacefully. In twilight I conversed with the moonshine. The silver moonshine — the moon-shimmer — moon-peace, was also over there, on the pale white face, on the still tired figure. I painted her dreams for her — I wove shadows over her sad, weary eyes.

Does she sleep? A youth sat near the bed on a low chair: he held her faded hand. How gently had he spoken to her—how beautifully—of death! of joy in death! He had prayed with her till she slept. The dark earnest eyes of the young man beamed with the peace and faith which make death so easy. Did not angels sweep down on white wings, gliding down the moon-rays that fell into the chamber? Whence came the light which brightened the face of the dying woman and of the young priest? Did she, then, sleep? No, she awoke. Her lip whispered a name—"Hannah." That name she often named — she called her child. The young man came forward. "Should he call her daughter?" "No, no," smiled the invalid. She pondered — she wished best to be alone with him: she had yet so much to say to him, and her time was so short. "Must she, then, really die?" I asked this question full of anxiety. There stood the medicine-bottles round me in a half circle, firmly corked, and with long white beards. They nodded softly to my anxious question. "She has yet so much strength: did you hear her speak?"

"She must die!—not to-day, but soon: she has yet but few days to live." So tinkled they softly back. Here, close to me, was a refreshing fever-drink: only a little was left now in the glass. "Can YOU not help?" "She has already drunk three times of me," said the glass: "I cannot help her." "But you, you dark-brown juice, in *you* is life: you foam in your glass!" "Hush! hush! I have served her: I must no more wet her lips. Hush! hush!" "But you have only just come. You wear still your coloured cap; and the warm breath of the sick-room brings damp mists on your cold glass. *You* come with fresh strength, and bring her life." "I bring nothing! She will drink me to the last drop, and—will then die. She must die—die!" I heard again the talking at the sick-bed. She spoke of the coming separation from her husband, her child; of her Hannah's unprotected youth. "Did you say, Hannah's unprotected youth, dear mother? Has she not got still her devoted father? And—and—is it possible, mother? Can you misunderstand the hope of my heart? Have you not known—and also the

father . . . . Oh, it is indeed rash to dream of such happiness! but would you not give your treasure into my care?" The dying woman smiled fondly at him under her tears. She laid her feeble hand on his head, stroked the dark waves of his hair, and smoothed them fondly down. Then she spoke again. He had, indeed, understood rightly, when he felt that for years it had been hers and the father's dearest wish to see him yet closer bound to their hearts as their daughter's husband. So said the mother; but that was still so far distant, so far away in the future, that she will never live to see her darling in her bridal wreath. Yet she would like so much—it is her last wish on earth, she said—it would make her departure easier, could she only before she dies place Hannah's hand in his; and thus, through the betrothal of to-day, receive a pledge of their future happiness.'

'Croak! croak!' cried the Toad in the pond.

'What was that?' asked the Flame.

'Be quiet there,' whispered the Water-lily; 'a story of mankind is being here related, and you must not disturb us.'

'The youth rose,' continued the Wandering Light, 'and stood by the side of the bed; his breast heaved, his cheek burned. He glanced at the invalid as if he wished to say something; but he turned abruptly and silently away. With rapid steps he paced up and down. Was it my misty, subdued light that made him look so pale? Does one become white and blanched, even to the lips, with offered happiness? Glowing with joy had he listened to the mother; now his features are convulsed with a hard struggle; his lips are pressed painfully together; his forehead is deadly white. Then he stepped again to the sick-bed and spoke. I did not understand the trembling sound. What was it?—what did he mean? Did he refuse her? Did he throw his happiness away? Yes; if I understood all he said. He took both hands of the sick mother in his, and implored her not by one premature word to disturb her sweet child's dream of peace, —she must not gain a vow from Hannah's child-lip that her heart could not respond to. He would not gather from life's tree an unripe fruit, —a fruit which perhaps, in the sunshine and rain

which the years would bring, might fall ripe into his waiting hand. The youth was much moved; his speech rang impressively, assuredly, convincingly. The sick woman spoke only a little, with feeble voice, speaking low—restless and anxious. He took up her hand, and I heard him distinctly say, "See, dearest mother, here is Hannah's fire-sign burnt in; the hand that is thus marked, that hand will I never give to another!"'

'Croak! croak! croak!' came up again from the pond.

'Oh, I am so frightened—that sounds so dreadful!' groaned the Flame, and trembled so violently that its small, delicate acorn-cup began to rock like a boat on the wild waves of the sea.

'You had better remain perfectly quiet,' said the Water-lily; 'the Toad and I are old friends: it is only that you are relating such a dismal history of life.'

And the Flame recovered itself and related further: 'Kneeling by the bedside, and leaning over the invalid, the youth spoke of his love, his hopes. He said how sweet, how kind Hannah

was, that at some future time he hoped to win her! How precious the thought was to his heart! Oh, the mother! the mother! I saw the colour mount into her cheeks, the bright light into her eyes. Ah! this was life's happiness; she wished yet to live—she wished to see her child's happiness! The glasses clinked—again they clinked. Happiness—with death! happiness—with fever! Did you hear nothing? did you see nothing? —the fever! the fever is coming back! Ah! I heard!—I saw!—I heard the death-watch knocking in the wall, heard the rushing of broad wings. Quite in the dark corner,—far beyond my feeble light-circle,—there it is moving, there it is fluttering, there it swings like a forked bat's wing! grey fog-mists creep along—the air is so close, so oppressed! It draws near—the head covered; high above, in wide circles, it swept about in the room. It is waiting for the dying. There it hangs on the bed-curtain; it stretches out and grasps it firmly with a hard grip, hot and fiery as glowing iron. Oh, what a horrid face grins above the grey folds of the curtains! White—distorted—with staring eyes, entangled

hair. Ha! draw a veil over. Again it looks out, but now in blooming youth,—roses, and smiles, and shining locks. Now comes another and another, and still another face, just the same as before. Whole rows of them wrapped in grey veils floated by,—whirled and danced round the sick-bed. Did the youth not see them—the pointed wings sweeping so near the invalid?—the fiery claw lay heavily on her breast. He lays his hand upon her forehead—listens anxiously to her restless breathing. The side-door softly opened. There came a light step, and a bright girl's face, lovely and joyful as a sunbeam, glanced in. The small hand drew the bed-curtain, and a sweet voice asked, "Has my dear mother been sleeping?" The blue eyes glanced anxiously at the sick face, and settled inquiringly on that of the silent young man. She seated herself on a small chair, and stroked in order her mother's counterpane. Oh, horror! there it flies!' screamed the Flame. 'Did you not all see the pointed wings—the grey shadow?'

'What flies?—where?—who?' asked the

Water-lily, the fireflies and the weeds shrinking together.

'The fever flies—do you not see it?—there—beyond—in the great tree!'

Yes; they saw it—a thick, grey shadow—might it not be a cloud?—drawn from the haunted meadow along the tops of the trees. In the dark branches of the old maple it disappeared from their sight. The young wanderer under the tree felt himself surrounded by hot air. Grey veils waved before his eyes, broad wings rushed past his head. He stretched his neck towards where the great bat hung, and the vision disappeared in damp drops, which fell over the boy like a sudden rain-shower, and struck cold as ice through marrow and nerve. He noticed the owl had disturbed the damp foliage of the maple, so that it had wetted him through with icy water. The gloomy night-bird hooted in the thicket, and the toad croaked louder than before. Then he heard the Water-lily ask, 'What has become of the little Wandering Light?' and he saw the little acorn-boat swimming on its grass cord perfectly empty.

'The light is gone—is extinguished!' said the Firefly.

The Daisy-blossom asked, 'Has it not left a little heap of ashes in its small boat?'

'Do you imagine a Wandering Light dies like a pastille?' sneered the young Owlet: 'it does not die, though it is extinguished—it may have revived again out yonder!'

In the distance in the haunted meadow a bright wavering light had kindled. A crown of sparkling light, like diamond rays, shining in all colours, swept up over the moor. On coming nearer it flew asunder in the night air. Bright streams and lights fell from it like leaves and flowers,—wavered about the moor and scattered themselves again in numberless coloured flames and sparks. These gathered themselves together, shone like bands of jewels, or floated separately, forming fantastic patterns and arabesque designs. The water-lily and the fireflies, the ivy and blackberry, the rush-blossom, and all the other spectators, gave them an enthusiastic greeting. Even the young owlet, who was generally too fashionable to wonder or be astonished

at anything, even she cried out, '*Superbe!*' But she quickly silenced herself, stole a look round to see whether any one had remarked how much she had been amused, and yawned very irritably with her wings before her face. The coloured flames had joined in a row, and danced a round dance.

Thus joyously they came on to the bank of the small bay, and here they were assailed by the night company with questions and petitions if they could not find time to relate a life adventure. They separated in dances, and united again; scattered themselves through the bushes on the cliff, swept in the air, and hung like jewelled fruit on the twigs of the hazel, till at last they settled on the damp moss in a shining group. The water-lily watched in wonder, and could scarcely find patience to wait for the time when they would begin their histories. The owl rolled its brilliant eyes backwards and forwards in its head, and asked, 'Did they come from the East?—the land of light and sunshine—or from the magic palace of Sheherezaden?—or from the illusionary glowing poems of Persian song-books?'

'No; far—far from the sunlight, children of the shade and night!' spoke a laughing Green Flame. 'Close by here we were born, where the forest deepens and the shadows are broadest—under lime and plane-trees, in dark chestnut groves, there have we lived and flamed. Where that stately old house, whose bright festive windows shone down on the terrace; where the servants with swift feet hastened over the broad stone steps; where the elms rustled in the evening wind, and stone river-gods poured the imprisoned water of streams from marble urns, there we shone, lighting with brilliant-coloured festive lamps the gloomy trees in the park.'

A dazzling bright Flame, streaming in red fire, interrupted quickly: 'Many thousand roses glowed, and white lilies drank in the breeze and night-dew. A crowd of glowing, joyous beings strayed in the broad walks; full-dressed women, noble-looking men, the charms of youth and the haughtiness of youth, and deeply earnest questions and shy answers. There were many gaily-coloured groups of dancers on the yielding velvet carpet of short-shaven turf. Under the trees,

crackling about, flickered the forked resin-flames in high fire-baskets. There was a murmur of cheerful music. Clear, pealing, trumpet notes, haughty kettle-drums, and saucy fiddles were played, while dreamy, thoughtful bass-viols buzzed amongst them. To these, cymbals and little bells chimed in a childish accompaniment.'

Another Flame, violet blue, with faint dim light, here broke in: 'The roses are withered long ago—long ago! The dark fir-trees in the park have grown wonderfully since that night, and have many times strewed the ground with their brown needles. The stone statues stand crumbling and overgrown with moss. The wild water of the stream is no longer pent up in obstructed channels; it seeks its own way, and has already made two islands in the park. Ah! twenty years are a long, long time! The willow hangs weeping into the brook. The tree of life has faded too.'

'How tired and dim you appear—just like pale moonlight!' scolded the Green Light. 'Has the west wind brought you bad news from the valley? I do not grudge you your dance with him

over the waving grass; but if he always makes you sad, then I shall interrupt your gossip.'

'Is it already twenty years since that feast was held, and we were allowed to be present?' cried the Red Flame; 'it seems to me as if it were only yesterday. Oh, what a *fête* it was! Gaiety and joy floated tinkling through the cool evening air—over the refreshed park. Mignonette and lavender perfume, which had slept all day, waked up now, and soaring high followed the wanderers with enticing scent. Oh! and they!—the company!—laughing lips, brilliant eyes, wherever I looked!'

'And compressed, earnest lips, and cast-down, troubled eyes,' murmured the Violet-blue Flame, softly.

'What was the *fête* for?' asked Miss Owlet; 'was it a wedding?'

'Alas! oh, alas!' moaned the Blue Flame; but the Green one spoke: 'I heard nothing of weddings; I saw no bride in veil and wreath. Yet there were many lovely girls there worthy of wearing such adornments.'

'And many young men, ardent and bold,

who would gladly have taken encouragement to win a maiden's heart.'

'Oh, yes! and there was one above all!' cried the Red Flame, and shone brightly up in sparkling ruby-shine as it related: 'So tall and stately was he, like a noble young fir-tree, when the spring's smiling green covers freshly all its branches. His dark head was bathed as if in sunshine; the dark eyes shone with life's full happiness and joy, and on his lips danced a bewitching smile. His voice rang like music, and, as if borne on wings of wind, he flew in the dance over the green plain.'

'Listen,' said another Flame, burning in blended gold fire. 'He had come from over the sea, as far as from England, to visit his brother. Relations, too, had accompanied him; two kind young aunts and their noble mother. Did not you all see the slender island-daughters, with their gold-spun, long, silky hair?'

'Yes, *I* saw them,' said the Green Light; 'saw them like shadow-pictures, as I saw clouds near the evening star. But my evening star, the star of the evening, was another young maiden, the

loveliest of all! Deep-blue child-eyes shone in her sweet face; on her brown hair she wore a wreath of corn-blossoms.'

'I saw her dancing with the young stranger,' cried the Red Light; 'she danced only with him.'

'I saw her sitting with him on the stone-bench,' cried another; and a third said, 'I saw her strolling away with the youth—away from the ball-room through the rose-garden.'

'And *I* heard every word that they spoke together there,' cried the Ruby-red Light; 'the giant lime-tree which bore my lamp stood quite close.'

And the Violet-blue one spoke: 'The giant lime that hid us stood close enough; I heard also what they said to each other, and, oh! *another* also overheard it all!'

'Who was the other?' asked the Owl.

'A grave young man, who leant with his arms folded on the stem of the old lime-tree just beneath me. Jasmine-bushes, from which the white star-blossoms were already fallen, concealed him from the others; yet his dark eyes wandered everywhere till they settled at last on the face

with the dark-blue child-eyes which shone beneath the corn-flower wreath; but, alas! even so much loveliness could not bring a smile to his lips.'

'I also saw the pale dreamer,' spoke the Golden-yellow Light. 'An iron basket of bright-coloured flames stood quite close, and in the blazing light little Schabernack, the spirit of the sparks, jumped and skipped. Full of merriment at the joyous *fête*, it seemed to scoff and jeer at that serious man. It prattled disjointed talk, which I heard and understood. "Pshaw! why are you so deeply smitten? Does the pain burn at your heart? Oh! extinguish it!—you can quench it. Ho! water here!—quench love's glow! extinguish it!—extinguish it!—ha! ha!" Crackling and snapping it jumped high, sometimes flinging a spark on his shoulder, sometimes one in his hair. He took no notice—he did not feel it. There—puff—it seized on his hand; the mischievous glowworm gave it a hot sting,—that attracted his notice. He shrank together as he glanced down, and his dark look fell on a deep old scar on his hand.'

'Did you notice his painful laugh?' asked the Violet-blue Light. 'Ah! but tell us now, what those two beneath the rose-blossoms were talking about!' begged the Water-lily.

The Red Flame quickly answered, 'I would willingly, if I had only understood what it was about—joke and laughter,—merry children's talk. At last a rose-thorn caught the girl's fluttering dress; the young man loosened the thin gauze from the thorn, and in so doing gave it a little rent. The girl scolded the rude thorn. He said the rose-bush must not he blamed, as it had only tried to detain her. The only thing he was surprised at was, that it ever allowed her to go. She said the thorn, however, might have been more careful, as it was a pity to tear her dress. "The rose-bush has also lost a twig, torn from it," said he. "Look here, do you think, if one once held you fast and firm, that it could let you again go free without pain—without a wound?"'

'Did you hear the sigh of a sad heart from under the lime-tree?' added, in a whisper, the Blue Flame.

'The young man stooped,' continued the other again, 'and broke three freshly opened roses from the broken bough. He gave them to her and said, "She must perceive that she was so like the roses, that it was pardonable that the bush had mistaken her for one." They were pale, soft-coloured flowers, and were tinted also with a tender pink. These roses men called "maiden blush." There she stood, a perfect picture of these sweet bright blossoms. The sweet "maiden blush" rose before the young man. Blushing, she cast down her dark eye-lashes; she held the roses in her right hand, and had pulled them in pieces before she knew what she was about.'

'Are human beings always so cruel with poor flowers?' asked the Water-lily.

'The young man also said she was cruel,' said the Flame, 'tearing those lovely roses without remorse. "However, they should not die in this way—they should not be trodden under foot," said he, and gathered the torn petals from the ground, and strewed them in the flames of the nearest fire-basket.'

'Did he burn the limbs of the poor flowers?' cried the Water-lily, in horror.

'A heathen's death-rite,' observed the Professor Owl, and smiled very complacently.

The Green Light continued: 'The bright girl stood somewhat back. She stood in the shadow; but the forked flames swept bright changing light over the white lovely face. Yet piercing through those flames, still hotter burnt the shine of two dark eyes. She had turned away from that deep glance, but did not see that in the shade of the jasmine-bush two other dark eyes were fixed on her with a deeply-earnest and inquiring gaze.'

'How loud the nightingales sang in the bushes beyond!' sighed the Blue Light.

'The young girl said she was afraid of flames, for to destroy and devastate was their task.' So spoke the bright gold Flame, and related how the youth had praised the fire. In all that was great and beautiful it was a portion; in bright human spirit, in ardent hero-life, in wine, in precious stones, in great emotions! 'Oh! grand and splendid was the fire of life!—so bright and hot, so flaring and blending! What did it signify

if it should be short, and, when extinguished, if nothing but ashes remained? A dark cloud here spread over the park; a low rustling crept amongst the trees; a gust of wind rushed through their tops.'

So spoke the Violet-blue Flame dreamily.

'It was just then,' cried the Ruby-red one, 'that one of the fair maidens with soft curls came. Banteringly she asked,—"Shall I find another partner, Clement? Our dance has begun already;" and with joke and laugh he was carried off, and the fair girl with the wreath of corn-flowers went slowly away towards the jasmine-bush.'

'And she stood suddenly before the dreamer,' broke in another Flame.

'"Ulrick!" she exclaimed; "there you are at last!"

'The tall grave man asked doubtfully if she had been looking for him, but she denied it laughingly, and asked absently whether he was not going to dance?

'"You know, Hannah, that I never dance," he answered gently, and she recollected his spiritual

office, but said it seemed very sad that, even if he did not at other times, yet that to-night, just for once, he might dance.'

'Ah! yes, I recollect what she then said,' cried the Red Flame. 'She leant on his arm. "Oh! Ulrick!" said she, "you do not know how lovely it is here, under these magnificent green trees, to float, to fly to the clang of music! And all the air round scented with the lime-blossom! You smell the scent of the lime-trees here, do you not, dear Ulrick? Did you notice the small evening clouds before it grew so dark?—the small, shining, evening clouds,—sailing over the high arch of Heaven; so brightly red, as if it made them also shine brightly to see under them so many happy human beings?"'

'Alas! the poor, poor, happy child!' sighed the Violet-blue Flame.

The Green Flame said, 'She looked him full in the face with a sunny smile. He looked at her again, seized both her hands, pressed them hastily, but said nothing. "Oh! dear—dear Ulrick! Have you ever seen such a charming *fête?* No summer yet in my life has seemed so

green—so fragrant! Oh! do speak, dear Ulrick! do say that you enjoy yourself also."'

The Blue Light breathed softly, 'How fearfully pale he was!—but he pressed the heavy sigh back into his breast, and asked, "You are really—from your heart's depths—feeling happy and joyful, dearest Hannah?" "Yes, *really*, from the very depths of my heart, joyful and happy," she answered, and drew a deep breath.'

'A wonderfully bright light,' said the Red Flame, 'at the same time danced in her eyes.'

'But tears also flowed under those old lime-trees; a light sob I also heard there,' so murmured the Dark-blue Flame.

'Yes,' spoke the Green Wandering Light, 'she turned pale. "Ulrick! Ulrick!" she cried, anxiously, "you look so gloomy; you mean—is it not so?—that it is not right to be so happy, when we—when I—only a few weeks since wore mourning for our dear mother?" "No, Hannah! no. God knows I never meant that," he said, and took her softly in his arms. She leant her head on his shoulder and burst into tears; she murmured, that if she could only look once more

in the dear, dear eyes of her mother; for never, never had she felt so much an orphan as now in all this pleasure. He comforted her with kind, brotherly words, and she ——'

'Ah, and she! she let herself be comforted,' spoke the Ruby-red Light; 'she dried her tears and smiled again; she knew so well how he loved her talk, and she never waited for an answer. How sweetly she smiled as she begged a favour of him. She wished so much to learn to ride like Ellen and Maria. Clement would give her a lesson to-morrow if her dear, good Ulrick, the promoter of all good, innocent pleasures (so she called him), if he thought she might talk to her father about it—or would he?'

'She begged so sweetly, did you say?' spoke the Bat. 'It has often appeared to me as if it were a hard task for men to ask favours.'

'I do not know whether it was a hard task to the bright girl, or whether something else troubled her; but I hung low down in the lime-trees, and from thence I heard her heart beat, and saw, as she bent down, how often she stopped hesitatingly to draw a deep breath. The pale man

read plainly in her eyes the expected answer. He saw her changing colour and trembling before him—how dear she was to him—yet he remained firm. He was silent for some moments, and at last he said, very earnestly,—"Do you remember, Hannah, what our mother thought of women riding?" Well she knew it, well she knew how dangerous her mother thought it; but then her father had such safe horses—"Brown Alcydor was as gentle as a lamb." Brown Alcydor, he reminded her, had already been two years with them when he had returned from his travels, and that even then, when he wished very much to take her a short excursion on horseback to the mountains . . . . "Yes, I know; but that was *then*, Ulrick," said she: "but just think of Clement; our mother would certainly not have refused anything to Clement." "Do you know that for a certainty, Hannah?" he asked, with hollow voice.'

'The thunder rolled far away in the mountain,' spoke the Violet-blue Flame. 'Did you hear it? And as the maiden lifted up her eyes, did you see they were full of tears? "Ulrick!

Ulrick!" she cried; "I see that our beautiful plan must fail. Oh, do not look so sadly at me! You cannot think that I would act against our mother's wishes, not from the first minute when you reminded me of them."

'Fresh tears rolled over her cheeks; she held his hand inquiringly, and said softly, "You will tell your brother, will you not, that we had better not ride? Pray, dear Ulrick, you tell him—I cannot."

'He sighed heavily, and nodded to her an assurance. She heard steps coming, and went away to hide her tears.'

'Ah, the joyous face! the bright Clement!' cried the Ruby-red Will-o'-the-wisp: 'here he was again! Ah, it did one good to look into his laughing eyes. He asked his brother where Hannah was, and, without waiting for an answer, he laughingly upbraided Ulrick that he had never told him what an angel of loveliness his sister was. "Hannah is not my sister," said the other. No, truly he knew that; but the name of sister was so sweet; he envied him that. "When you have been here longer, Clement,

then you will find I am not to be envied," was the gloomy answer.'

'The brother did not see how pale he was,' said the Blue Flame; 'saw nothing of the strife within his breast.'

But the Red spoke,—'Yes, you know the joyous Clement had laughingly complained of that; he would not exchange with his serious brother. "A bright shining example his dear Ulrick was to him, yet perfectly unattainable." Brilliant words poured quickly from his lips as he praised his brother; and yet he added, that rather than be burdened with all the elevation of virtue, with all the costly knowledge of Ulrick, coupled with his heart's coat-of-mail and unsusceptibility, he would remain the light-hearted, susceptible, and vulnerable creature he now was. Though wounds give us pain, yet we have also given us a balsam for such woe.'

'Enough! enough!' cried the other Flame—the golden one; 'in a few words he taunted his brother with being cold and insensible, because he had lived so many years under the same roof with a fairy-being like Hannah, and yet had

never thought of winning that young heart. "Who has told my light-hearted, susceptible brother that I had never thought of it?"

'"Ah, well, you have always succeeded, Ulrick, in whatever you have undertaken; and as I see that you have not yet won Hannah's heart, I feel sure that you have never tried to do so."

'"What do you see? what do you know about it?" asked the pale man.

'"Oh, Hannah is as open as a child!" laughed the joyous brother; "her whole manner shows at once how you stand towards each other. Does she not treat you like a dearly-esteemed old uncle?"

'There shone a bright flash of lightning; was it that which made the stern man look so rigid, so ghost-like?'

The Blue Flame here joined in,—'He walked to and fro in the dark shade of the trees. In his eyes—ah! in the deep shade on his forehead —*there* was written what his soul suffered; how fiery and deep the struggle went on within him! A groan went through the forest.'

'Yes, the trees began to murmur,' related the Green Wandering Light; 'we began to be softly swung, and thought that the wind was coming to joke with us. Oh! there, in innocent happiness, came the young Hannah, so lightly, through the walks of the avenue. How Clement flew to meet her! She sent him on a speedy message to the house; she carried a basket of flowers in her hand, and, under the shade of the lime-trees, she stood before the pale Ulrick.'

'Then he stood still,' continued the Green Flame, 'and looked kindly at her; but the marble whiteness of his forehead gave no signs of warm life. He must help to make wreaths for the last dance of the *fête*, and quickly, too. They should have been made earlier, only they would have withered—now quick! How dreamily he took the flowers out of the maiden's hand, and said—said—he spoke of the flowers. Oh, I know not what he said. I did not understand; I could not remember it.'

'I did not listen to it,' cried the Red Light.

But the Dark-blue Flame said, 'He spoke so slowly, so emphatically, I have remembered

every word, for I understood them all. He spoke thus, "Flowers?—flowers, Hannah? If you wish to cultivate flowers, do not select those of human happiness. Pluck those that you find growing in your path, and may God grant that many may blossom for you full and fragrant: but do not toil and labour to cultivate them in your own garden. Be prudent; do not anticipate, do not reckon on every leaf of the young plant, on every new shoot; and when you see the buds, do not rejoice as if already you saw the blossoms. Yes, when you think you will rise in the morning and gather for yourself the splendid blossom, then, perhaps, a frost has come overnight, or a stranger's hand has torn it up with all its roots and fibres: that is dreadful!" The girl looked earnestly at him; she did not understand him; she said, "What is the matter with you to-day? You are so strangely grave! What is it, my dear old Ulrick?"'

'Hurrah! the storm-wind!' said the Golden Light. 'There it came, driving stormily in the dark tree-tops, and shaking them with might. There was no more swinging and rocking. Many of us had our coloured lives blown out by him,

and those who outlived the storm-wind were drunk up and killed by the rain's broad drops. What use was it that the great resin flame had struggled and battled for its life with crackles and sparks? How dumb the music had become! The storm had sent all the dancers into the house. Ha! how they ran! how the servants flew! How the rain-elves danced over the deserted lawn, poured rustling through the boughs of the trees, and collected on the broad gravel-walks!'

The Green Flame asked, 'Ah! well might the small red evening clouds have been so joyous as they shone down on the evening *fête*, for had they not invited all the dark clouds together? They mixed amongst the company in their thin water-stream dresses; but who would have recognised them as the same that shone in the evening heavens? Other pale glancing blue-lights flashed here now, and other voices were fearfully loud. The rocks and earth trembled; everything bowed itself, and bent and shook—everything but the daring joy of man. Behind the glass-windows of the mansion there shone a

flood of light The kettle-drums and crashing trumpets soon sounded again through storm and night, and the joyous tones reached us outside. I had outlived all the others. The thick stem of the lime-tree had shaded me from the storm-wind, the leaves formed a green roof over me, and I could see, through the rose-bushes over to the dancing-lawn, where wafted now the silver veil of the wet shower-dancers. I saw a bit of the Manor-house: the ancient corner-tower, the old terrace with the stone balustrade. Through the bright windows the music rang, but subdued. I heard a forest-horn loudly clanging among the instruments, but it did not seem to like the festive room; it was longing for the fresh air of night, and the rustling of summer trees. The storm had at last become still. The rain-drops fell monotonously: monotonously also fell a man's heavy steps up and down the wet gravel-walk. I knew the pale forehead, the bowed head. He did not mind the rain which fell on him through the tree roof. Every now and then he swept the wet hair off his face. At last he stopped with folded arms. I saw him raise his

dark eyes up to the night heavens; they were clouded with black mists—no stars shone there. But yet, as I glimmered earnestly into his eyes, it seemed to me as if he had seen a star. The battle in his heart was over. A deep-drawn breath shook his breast, and he went slowly back to the house. I saw him disappear through the dark porch of the door. I was the only light that yet remained in the midnight park. The lime-tree leaves over me began to rustle; I saw a heavy drop waving over my head, and I—I saw no more.'

'That was indeed a long history,' yawned the young Owlet, loudly, and fanned itself refreshingly with its wing: 'I am quite hot from it.'

'Oh, it was beautiful!' said the Water-lily. 'I did not quite understand it all, but it was still very beautiful.'

'To understand a story rightly, my child, belongs to the experience of life,' explained Miss Owlet.

Professor Owl had long sat still, thoughtfully pressing to his claw the end of his crooked beak. Now he shook his thick head and said,

'The flowers of life's happiness were quite unknown to him; never in his travels in foreign lands, never in books or herbariums, had he met with them,—also Linnæus mentioned nothing of a *fortuna terrestris.*'

'Why use such long Latin words?' cried a Firefly: 'we know them in our native tongue quite well—I and all my comrades; only everybody calls the "flowers of happiness" by different names. Either an inheritance or a rich wife—or a great lottery prize—or "*avancement,*" "*carrière,*" &c. &c.'

'"*Avancement,*" "*carrière,*" are truly in native tongue,' pertly observed Miss Owlet. But the second Firefly, whose soul beat high, said, 'Earth's happiness is no flower, but an evergreen tree; laurel and myrtle are its right names.' Then all were silent, and their gaze wandered to the side of the bay where just before the coloured flames had danced and glittered, and where now it was so still and dark; only far down below, near the water, there burnt on a wet stone a high clear flame. How had it come there? No one knew, and no one could believe that it had come like

the other wandering lights, over the lake. It stood firmly upright, with solemn mien; it burnt calmly and shone with a clear, penetrating light. As all watched it with expectation, but each one felt too abashed to address it, it broke the silence itself, and with full tones spoke slowly: 'I was a church-light ——!'

'A church-light!' interrupted loudly and sneeringly Professor Horned Owl. 'I wonder what sort of people, after your death, would still value you as a church-light! In what century did you live, my very worthy and honourable *Ignis fatuus?*'

'In the nineteenth hundred century, Mr. Professor. But you mistake me,—I was for the day of my life an altar-candle.'

'Oh! then I beg your pardon, I had indeed not understood you,' sneered the Horned Owl. 'I don't expect, though, that we have a very piquant history to hear—when dead fathers of the Church skip on the fens at night-time as will-o'-the-wisps!'

The Flame looked at him earnestly and silently. After a pause it spoke: 'In the middle

of a wide blooming valley, on a hill, lay the little old church. The wood-wreathed mountain, crowned with rugged rocks, stood round in a half-circle and smiled down on the grey child of the valley, the many-century-old monument of a devout time. The blue vault of heaven spanned over it,—and the soft summer air, the warm rays of the June sun, played in the lime-trees by the church tower. Within the sacred edifice it was cool, and pleasant, and mysterious. The mountain and the trees could not look into the holy place, only the clear eyes of the dear Son of God looked through the high many-coloured windows. From both sides of the altar, as far as the entrance, stood the rows of strong slender pillars; high and lofty they were, and supported the roof. They did not carry it like a heavy covering that burdened them. They lifted it with strong arms as lightly as though it were a gift which love freely gave, and would willingly waft nearer to the heart of Him for whom it longed.

'Oh, holy sanctity of the house of God! Thy quiet walls breathe peace, and holy veneration

waits on thy threshold. The altar was decorated with fresh flowers. On a rose carpet stood the cross, from whose height the mild eyes of the Holiest look down. Near it shone the pure blossoms of that marriage ornament, the snow-white lily; of which two tall clusters stood on each side by the two candle-lights. Flowers had been strewn on the steps of the centre aisle—young garden-blossoms, gathered in the cool morning dew. These were the only life in those still old walls. Where were the hands that had built those pillars? How many altar-candles had already burnt here and been extinguished? How many words of blessing had been here spoken? The lips which had spoken them—the heads that had bowed in reverence to receive the holy sign of the Church—the hearts which had here beaten, how many of those hearts throbbed yet? Cold and still was now that empty space, and without, through the arch of the open church-door, I saw under the green trees many old broken grave crosses—waving grass—and many fresh-woven flower-wreaths. How many are resting out there who once worshipped here within? And of those

who would pray here to-day?—There are still many empty spaces in the churchyard. So I dreamt on—a bright burning altar-candle—when loud chimes of bells sounded from the tower, and the inhabitants of the valley in holiday dress entered the churchyard.'

The Water-lily said, 'Ah, it was pleasant for you when people came, and when you were no longer alone in the silent church!'

The Flame went on,—'I saw many honest faces waiting there at the church-door—swarthy brown-bearded cheeks under the straw hats, and many women with true bright eyes, with children in their arms. I saw, too, cheerful girls' faces with long curls. They all looked towards the old walls of the park, which stood near the churchyard. The large iron gates stood wide open, and in the shadowed roads in the park slowly appeared a long festive train. The bells' voices stopped. The organ opened its holy mouth and streamed the full tones of a pious old hymn through the house of God. It sounded through the still place, floated up, and rang clearly again from the vaulted roof. Softly

a small door opened—I heard steps in the side-aisle, and saw a young priest approach the altar. What to him had been the blossoms of life? He grew deadly white at the sight of them, and a still quiver of agony shook his lips. With a deep sigh he shook it off and mounted the steps, pressed his folded hands against his breast, and prayed quietly. I heard many steps in the church—a rustling of garments—a whispering—a vibration. I saw confused colours glittering—yet only as if in a mist—like a picture seen in a dream. My weak flame-eyes shone only on the quiet suppliant in fervent prayer, and I saw only him. I noticed how his breast heaved and throbbed, but a conquering light stood out on his forehead, and in the upraised eyes there shone a dawning reflection of the peace of the soul. It seemed to me as if the quiet breath of his prayer animated even the pillars around him, as if the grey stones expanded themselves, grew higher, and opened. The nave of the church became wider and loftier, and transparent, and, borne by the deep faith of prayer, it appeared to mount upwards and show heaven's light. A sunbeam broke

in, and then the organ was stopped. I heard the priest's voice full and steady ringing through the church. He had risen, and stood now facing the people. He stood erect, and looked full of seriousness and softness on a young pair at the steps of the altar.'

'A bridal pair?' cried the young Owlet. 'Was it really going to be a wedding?'

'Croak! croak! croak!' sounded from the pond below; and the boy under the maple felt a cold shiver run over him.

'A wedding-service the young priest had now to perform,' spoke the Flame. 'Two young hearts beat high and holy; and now, through the mouth of the priest, their golden dream of happiness shall be ratified for this life and for eternity. The sweet dream shall be given continuance for a long earth's life, and even far beyond the grave. Such holy hopes I read in the blue child-like eyes of the graceful bride, as she bent with timid grace before the priest. She trembled slightly at the sublimity of holy earnestness which she read in his face. The deep solemnity of the moment, when she stood before God's

sight to make her vow, may have touched her with deeper emotion than she had ever felt before, and, white and trembling, she clung to the arm of her betrothed. The stately young man looked agitated, but happy also. With loving confidence he took her hand, as if to assure her that he held the tender hand in his to give her courage and protection.'

'This strong hand which you have described so well, that held the delicate one so firmly,' whispered a Forget-me-not on the bank; and it asked pleadingly, 'Oh, say, did you see any scar on the hand?'

'I saw a scar,' said the Flame, 'yet not on his hand: on the priest's hand was the scar.'

'Oh, poor, poor hand!' said the Water-lily; and the Ivy-spray remarked, 'Where scars are, there has pain once been gnawing: but it has also died away. The priest's voice rang full and sounding, did you not say?'

'Yes, full and powerful,' said the Flame; 'and firmly rang the words of his sermon from his lips. He had taken the words of the prophet,

"Those who trust in the Lord gain fresh strength, so that they can mount with the wings of the eagle: they can run and not be weary; they wander, and are never tired."'

'Did he say these words over the young pair?' asked Miss Owl: 'over those who, in the full bloom of youth and strength, and overflowing with happiness, stood before him? The pale man should have preached these words to himself.'

'He stood firm as a rock,' spoke the Flame: 'a triumphal light shone on his forehead. But happiness and a bright flush require a firm foundation not to fail—not to fade away. Therefore he exhorted them, with warm fervour, to seek that support which would not fail them in eternity. After that they exchanged rings and he spoke the blessing over them.'

'As he witnessed their exchanging rings,' said the Ivy-spray, 'and when the bride saw the scar on the priest's hand, what happened then?'

'When they exchanged rings, the bride saw nothing but the ring; and when the hand was

placed in hers, she only saw the hand that should place the ring on her finger: and that hand was perfectly smooth, and bore no scar. The organ pealed again; a jubilee hymn of thanksgiving rolled and surged in high waves through the old walls. Then all was over; the hymn was dumb; the melody on the organ gradually softened, and expired tenderly and slowly. The bride wept softly in her father's arms. I saw greetings, and heard blessings evoked. They passed, one after the other, through the entrance. The sacristan neared the altar: the ceremony was ended.'

'Always the scar—the scar on the hand!' murmured the listener under the maple. 'I know a hand with just such a scar.'

'So that was a wedding!' cried a sprig of Wild Thyme. 'I always pictured to myself that a wedding was merrier.'

A bright light, like summer lightning, glanced over the moor. Two flames, high and slender, and burning bright, drew near the edge. The one danced and flickered restlessly, the other whirled in circling rays, and cried joyfully,—

'Come on, come on, whosoever wishes to hear anything from us! Listen quickly—it will not last long.' It glistened close to the water, leant lightly against the root of a tree, and spoke:—

'I have been at a ball, and I will tell you all about it.'

A Firefly said,—'One can easily see you have been at a ball: you are dancing still.'

'Oh, sweet liberty!' said the Wandering Light, and breathed brightly up. 'Sweet liberty out here on the wide, damp moor! Free from wick and candlestick! To be able to dance and skip on the green meadow; dive and float on the boggy water! Did you fancy that I was allowed to dance at the ball? No, I had to sit still and steady the whole time—held firm in a clammy wick. Always creeping down the wick, and yet never getting to the ground—flickering in longing, consuming in longing, that is the life of a candle.'

'Where was the ball? who gave it?' asked the other Firefly.

'Yes, who gave it?' said the Flame; and

looked round for its companion, who shone brightly and steadily behind.

'Who gave it? Why, I suppose the nymph of the spring, who gives everything on that beautiful mountain. The human beings who danced there were all her guests, and had thronged there from far to drink the wonderfully healthy water at her spring. I certainly did not see the nymph of the spring at the ball; the saloon was so large, the glittering crowd so variegated and thick. I do not know if she really gave the ball, but we were both there—I and my sister here. In the ball-room, on a high pillar near a window, was my place. On a bronze chandelier three of us sat, with bright streaming flames—flickering with life's happiness, with dance happiness, but bound to the walls! Just ask a young daughter of mankind whether there is any joy in sitting still when sweet seductive music calls to the dance? Near me the window-blinds were thrown open: the breath of orange flowers floated in upon the cool night-air, and streamed through the heated saloon. As intoxicating as music is the breath of

orange flowers: young flames love to listen to it when it tells that it loves them; and as it whispered softly and fluttered caressingly round them, the two other candles soon forgot both the dance and the human beings. But not I. I shone brightly through the wide entrance-door. I saw the guests arrive—long trains of them . . . .'

'Tell us about the guests; explain to us all —all!' cried the Grasses and Green Weeds together.

'I shall only tell you about one couple,' said the Wandering Light; 'the crown of the feast! There shone a sea of light in the saloon: rustling with silken garments, a soft breathing of many human voices; the glad clang of music and the cool stream of flower-breath floated blended together, and below moved the coloured throng of guests. I looked down upon all this splendour from my exalted position; and thousands of candle-lights, my sisters, in groups on the walls, and on chandeliers hanging down from the ceiling, saw it all also. It was so bright down there below! The wide doors flew open,—there

they entered: a slender, delicate woman, of wonderful beauty, on the arm of a tall, dark man. All eyes turned towards her, and all my candle-sisters flamed still brighter, and glanced shining down upon her. Wherefore was she so bright? The candle-light floated from the white folds of her silk dress and shimmered in golden sparks on her brown curls. Pure and bright she looked, like a dew-drop or diamond decked in light, and beaming with brightness. Softly shone her blue childlike eyes as she entered the room, unembarrassed and unconscious how every glance was fixed in admiration on her.'

'Did she wear a wreath of corn-blossoms in her brown curls?' asked a small Grass.

'No, she wore a cluster of white roses on her breast. Her beautiful head had no other ornament than its rich, luxuriant tresses, which seemed almost too heavy for so delicate a form. Her neck drooped slightly, as if under the weight of a load that pressed on it.'

'A young head that bears no heavier load than its wealth of tresses never droops to the ground,' said the Ivy-spray.

'Did I say she carried no other load?' said the Wandering Light. 'Ah! as she came nearer I saw the shadow on her forehead, and round her sweet mouth were lines that told of grief! The tall, slender man by her side was like the dark setting of the bright gem. I saw how proudly he looked at his lovely wife; a satisfied smile of triumph played round his lips as he escorted her through the crowd of people. Ah! he looked noble and splendid! How imperiously his dark eyes flashed! how finely cut were his perfect features!'

The other Flame broke in. 'Trust him not! trust him not!' cried it; 'his smile brings sorrow —the imperious glance of his dark eye only carries woe!'

The first, however, went on: 'Go away! go away! I cannot bear that you should throw shadows on my beautiful picture. I am light, and will only relate of light; if you prefer to paint in shadows you may do so afterwards. I saw how attentive and careful he was as he conducted his beautiful wife to a chair just directly under me, warning her of the draught of air—

that enemy to lights and men! I saw many greetings—they were soon surrounded by the other guests. An old man stepped up, a friend in his youth of her father's. Who, then, was so bright and cordial as that charming young bride? Dancing-partners also presented themselves. The husband begged she would dance, and she willingly consented. There sounded a burst of music—she was whirling round, but I noticed she looked quickly round. She stepped to the side of her husband; she was perfectly white, and she glanced anxiously up at him as she laid her hand on his arm, and spoke with a voice so deeply imploring, as if her life rested on the answer, "Clement, will you not also dance?" "Certainly, my love, later; but I must speak a few words with some friends who are here." He smiled on her.'

'Did he smile? it was only with the lip,' said the other Flame. 'He promised; but did she believe his promise? What happened? what did she do?'

'She sighed deeply and sadly,' replied the first Flame. 'She pressed her hand on her breast, and

as she went through the saloon she seemed no more to me to shine like a diamond, but with her dimmed, moistened glance she appeared to me much more like a precious pearl. She swept in the dance round the room as lightly and smoothly as if borne on air. The white silk folds of her dress floated glistening round her. I even forgot my desire for dancing in the pleasure of watching her. She stopped, and her eyes glanced searchingly round the room. Only once a ray of pleasure shone from her blue eyes when she saw her husband leaning against a pillar, and he nodded smilingly to her. After every pause in the dance she again sought his glance, but alas! at each pause she sought it in vain. The place by the pillar was empty, and in the wide space of the saloon no beloved eyes met hers. Again and again she swept round in the dance. How sad, though, she looked—how pale! In the quick whirl of the dance a rose from the bouquet at her breast was scattered; the white petals fluttered round her, wafted away by the current of air they were scattered far from her. Was she not like the white flower? were not the leaves of

life's happiness fast falling also from her? How tired she looked! Her head drooped. I saw what no other saw—two bright drops fall on the roses. What strangely hot dew that was! Then I heard her murmur a few words to her partner—it was so hot in the ball-room she could not bear it. She took the arm of her father's old friend, and begged him to take her out; she wished to walk through the other rooms.'

'Oh, take her far away if she is so unhappy!' said the Water-lily; 'bring her here to us in the cool forest—we will be so fond of her.'

The Ivy-branch said, 'It is many years, remember, since that evening, and years make the heart quiet,—yes, even quiet as death.'

'As death!' repeated softly a tired Echo that was wandering in the valley, and 'Croak! croak!' cried the Frog in the water.

'Ho! ho! light here! more excitement!' shouted the second blazing Wandering Light, and whirled wildly about. 'Call the storm-wind, whirl the water, ruffle and toss the trees! Listen to me—listen to me—listen to what the Flame-spirit tells. I despise a still, quiet audience,

still water, still trees—stir, movement is life; change is life; the breath of life is excitement—ha! burning, sparkling excitement!'

'Ha! you must be mad!' said the quiet Thyme-blossom: 'we suppose that you also come from the ball?'

'Yes, from the ball, but not from the ball-room. It is not the dance alone that makes the heart beat and the cheeks burn; sweeter than music jingles the ring of gold. A small room—retired—nearly lost by the distance—the dance music scarcely reached it. A select few assembled here together. They did not shun the hot, intoxicating drink; they did not shun the wild fever of excitement; they fought smilingly the fierce battle—the battle fought for the rolling ball of luck. Woe to the conquered! and woe, woe to the conquerors! I burned on the table; many coloured cards lay around, and pieces of gold. Men sat round playing; their hot breath streamed over me. With a quick gripe one and another seized me—moved me first here, then there. Oh, how they glared! A flame-spirit understands the deep fire that burns in the eyes,

the enjoyment that makes the lip quiver. Ah! woe to the flame that understands all this! Where gold and cards mingle there lurk *lies* in the next turn; *ice-cold selfishness* raises itself up, and removes with its hard hand all soft traces from the human face. Demons hide in the gleaming gold-bits, and also in the cards—demons who hold a painful influence over weak human hearts; who mingle mischievously among the players, entangling and ensnaring their minds. Oh! how the excitement kindled up! how it glowed in the dark eyes of the tall, slender man! how it beat in the weak man's heart! Out of a well-filled purse he scattered the gold pieces on the table. His hand wandered with restless pleasure among the glancing coins. A gold ring shone on the same hand—a wedding ring!'

'A wedding ring? alas!' sighed the Ivy-spray, 'is then such a sacred token no shield against the demon of Play? does it give no powerful warning to flee the approach of temptation?'

'Oh, how he played! how he played!' continued the Wandering Light; 'the gold pieces before him became fewer, the burning fire in his

dark eyes burned more gloomily and wildly. The greater the risk the greater the happiness. Then I saw a white vision enter at the door, leaning on the arm of an old man. It turned; it released itself from the supporting arm and stepped in. Over the carpet it swept with soft, fairy steps. Ha! how I waved and signed to it! Back! back! you white, fairy figure! what are you doing here? Oh, go away! go away! She, that deadly white, lovely angel of a woman, took no notice of the glance of a candle-flame. Behind one of the players she paused and stood, looked up in the mirror opposite, and saw there reflected their two faces—his and hers! There were other men seated at the table. One rolled a chair to it for her, she thanked him with a gentle bend of the head, but remained standing. He played and played. He mixed and shuffled the cards with dexterous hand, he dealt them out as lightly as if they had been coloured feathers, and the gold he gathered up as if it also were either cards or feathers. Oh, wild, fascinating, dangerous play! Had she really any pleasure in it? She looked only in the glass at his blanched

face, at his convulsively compressed lips. Distorted, disfigured by base emotions, were his noble features.'

The Ivy-spray whispered softly, 'God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him.'

'I read in her fixed blue eyes,' said the Wandering Light. 'Oh, flame-spirits, take an interest in reading the light of eyes. In those blue stars I read of hot, burning pain. She opened her lips—would she call his name?—but no sound came from her breast. And he—he felt not the soft breath that whispered caressingly through his hair; felt not the tender hand that rested lightly on his shoulder. Did not the ring on his finger warn him? The tender hand carried also a similar token.* Down, down rolls the luck, rolls the gold; more and more the gold pieces were piled up before him. As he stretched out his hand to gather them up she shuddered, as if each gold piece were a poisonous demon! Who wins gold carries home the sin.

* In Germany, both husband and wife exchange rings at marriage.

There is no heartiness in his laugh; there comes no true tone out of such a breast. And her poor, poor, blue eyes! what did I read in them? what did they see in the mirror? Only what caused her misery to look at—the wild, exultant joy in his look, on his lip—a demon's joy, which bore more of mockery. Oh, rather would she see anger and displeasure traced in his face than that jubilee of sin! And then the hand; can that be the same hand which so often with soft pressure had touched hers?—the hand that bore her ring? How wildly thy heart throbbed, thou poor, white woman! but keep quiet—keep quiet! consume with pain, poor heart, as I do in flames —life is short. But is not the room hot here? hotter than in the ball-room? She gasped for breath; her eyes fell from the reflection in the glass. They fell upon one of the players—a youth—a mere boy! and oh! how exhausted, how white he looked! his cheeks so hollow! his eyes sunk, and with a fever glow! and all this time perhaps a mother's heart was praying, a mother's heart grieving for him! Oh, how delicate looked the hand that staked now the

last gold piece! Worn out, with arms crossed, he flung himself back in his chair. And *he*—her husband—he had won that last gold piece! I saw her shudder; an agony-fit of trembling seized her—a cry of misery pierced her breast; sinking, fainting, she was supported by strangers. That one cry of misery reached the player's ear. He sprang up, the table was upset, the lights were overthrown, and I was extinguished.'

'Oh, how horrible!' sighed the Water-lily; and the young Owl observed, 'I have a friend, a raven, who would have enjoyed hearing this story.'

The Toad croaked loudly in the pond; the reeds and the trees shook with a shiver; and on the bank under the maple there gleamed a pair of wide-open eyes, looking out into the night. The cold sweat stood in thick drops on a white young forehead, and deep sighs heaved in an anxious breast. The forest-trees became quiet, and rush and grass stood still and listened, when that startled human heart beat in quick pulses. A fresh Will-o'-the-wisp had arrived, and was already in the middle of its tale, ere the

agitated boy had collected his senses sufficiently to listen.

The Will-o'-the-wisp related of a sick child, by whose bed it had watched. Thus it spoke:—'Ah, I was so tired—so tired! Already I had watched late into the night; and always, always watching, always drinking, drop by drop, the weary oil. And I so tired—so fearfully tired! I had already watched the whole evening, and yet I shone with a clear eye, and dare not sleep, or even settle myself comfortably. The doctor had stayed late, sitting by the bedside, watching or feeling the child's pulse. He told the young mother that the crisis was passed, the peril over; her child would be restored to her. She had accompanied him to the door,—she must now think of herself, he said; she must recruit her own exhausted strength. After he had gone, all was quiet. At the little child's bed knelt a lovely young woman. She lifted up folded hands and moist eyes. Ah, those eyes! a mute prayer of thanksgiving shone from them. With a happy smile her eyes rested on her child. She stroked the little wasted hands, dried the

moisture of sleep from the little pale, beloved face. So late! and the night so still, and everything slept. The sick child slept also—only I and the young mother slept not. How white she looked, and how ill! How sad were her beautiful eyes!—sad from tears and night-watching. The rich hair was drawn back carelessly from the forehead as if it were too heavy a burden. So sunken the cheeks, so transparent the skin. The grief shone through that struggled so hard within. 'My child! my poor, poor child!' So she whispered. She buried her face in the bed-clothes and burst into tears, into irrepressible burning tears. Her whole frame was shaken. Heavy sobs burst from her breast.'

'Was she not contented and pleased?' asked the Water-lily. 'Does joy appear like that?'

The Flame said, 'I was so tired,—it was so dark: so dark was it also in her heart. Perhaps it made her miserable to be alone with her great joy. She had sent the faithful old servant away. No one need wait any longer with her, she had said; only I—tired as I was, I watched,—I watched. On the chimney-piece ticked the clock.

The rain dripped monotonously from the gutter. The bitter tears were dried—the young mother sat on a cushion at the foot of the bed. She looked sadly and fixedly into vacancy. Her hands lay folded on her knees. Carriages rolled through the streets. She raised her head, but let it sink again as they passed. Stiller grew the night and later, no more carriages rolled by. Only the watchman's horn sounded, and now and then the step of a foot-passenger. How that pale woman listens! There come steps,—far off on the wet stones,—far—far through the night. How she listens! Ah!—and when they passed by how heavily she sighed! The shadows under the eyes grew deeper. She watched, and I, so tired—ah, so tired!—watched with her.'

'What is the good of a tired watcher?' said a Firefly. 'As you were so tired and sleepy, why did you not shut your little candle-eyes and extinguish yourself?'

'Should I leave her alone?—alone in the dark night, with her wakeful tear-heavy eyes, with the heavy grief in her breast that would not let her sleep? Ah, do you not understand? Light

shines down into the heart. A spark of light, even a dim subdued lamp, is a friend in deep heart-ache. I don't understand you, you shining beetle-boy. Perhaps some day if you are a light, and know what an anxious heart that waits alone in the night is, and wet tired eyes that cannot sleep, you will be a comfort that does not go away. Then you will persevere and comfort—comfort with mild shine till the first morning beams break through the window—those beams which understand better than either you or I how to bring comfort.' The Firefly looked at him, and was silent, as if it meditated over these words, and with crackling voice the Flame whispered again :—

'Still, still night,—and stiller, softer rain in the street. What was the matter with the pale mother? Her boy slept on—she started up,—a fleeting red flushed over her cheeks. Hark! a man's steps in the street—she knew them well. Oh, alas, the bell!—so shrill, so loud! The mother glanced, startled, towards the little sleeper. He had turned his head, but still slept. I saw her listening eagerly towards the door. She

parted the thick folds of the heavy curtain that hung over it, laid her hand on the lock, and gently turned it. She did not open the door—she would only listen, listen; her delicate white profile against the dark curtain, yet now no longer white. Oh, what a light shone in the beautiful moist eyes! The house-door had opened—she bent forward and listened. It is he! He speaks! He is angry. Yes, yes, the carriage should have been sent—of course, of course. Ah, why had she not thought of it? Alas! how occupied her thoughts had been! She heard steps in the corridor. The servant went first with the light. The glimmer fell through the key-hole. Now he would open the door,—now! No, no. They are going past. She had heard no question, not one single question—oh! Then she wrung her delicate hands and pressed them against her forehead. Then she listened again. He would soon return; he had only gone to change his damp clothes—it still rains so! There slammed a door, there came steps again,—only the servant—he was going to bed. She placed her ear to the door—and listened still for a long time. So

quiet the night,—so quiet the house. No steps in it—no more steps in the street; in the quiet room only the soft, regular breathing of the sick little one, and the anxious sighs of the lonely mother,—the lonely woman. She closed the door, went a few steps, and stood still. How wretched she looked! how white her cheeks! She wrung her hands: "He does not care, does not care how it is here! He has not even asked, has not come in!" That was a heavy, deep heart-sigh. She trembled sadly—pressed her hands against her breast. I saw her totter on a few steps further, to the bedside of her child, and there she sank down with a wail of anguish. Ah, full of mercy—kind and blessed was the swoon that came over her, that took her to its arms, and stilled for the time her heart's agony! Women came running in from the next room, and raised the fainting one on to a sofa. From her lips fell dark blood-drops on her dress, on her child's bed. Where her head had sank, there the terrified servants saw fresh blood-drops. Oh, poor, poor woman! oh, poor sick child! and poor lamp that had burned so long

and waited so patiently only to see it come to this!'

'Was she dead?' asked the Water-lily. 'Oh, in pity say she was not dead.'

'What had you received for all your long weary night-watch?' asked the Firefly. 'Not even thanks!'

'Oh! I had not thought of thanks,' spoke the Flame; 'we little lights do not shine for thanks or praise. That may be reserved for those who wish to appear like great shining lights in man's sight.' The Water-lily asked once more, 'Oh, pray tell me—she was not yet dead?'

But the Wandering Light sputtered and sank down, and would not tell any more. Many wandering will-o'-the-wisps danced over the haunted meadow and disappeared; many had hung about and related stories, and then sank or had sprung into the pond, or were glancing under the trees, or had lost themselves in the forest. But there yet flickered a few streaming lights over the moor; and the fireflies flew towards them and called them to the bank. Many of them related disjointed tales of where they had lived,

when they had burnt on wicks in the abodes of men. But at last one took up the thread of the story and spoke thus:—'Through deep valleys and clefts of the rocks, over streams and deep lakes, along green meadows, and across desert swamps, by overhanging cliffs, far, far from here have I wandered! In dark nights I danced in magic circles, and I carried everywhere with me, all through the land, a deep earnest longing —a longing for two deep-blue eyes, into which I had once gazed, when I lived a candle-light on a wick. I shall never find rest till I have once more seen those dark-blue eyes!'

'Were they human or flower eyes?' asked the Water-lily.

'Oh! human eyes—full of soul—dear, child-like eyes, in the white face of a dying woman! Supported by cushions and soft pillows, she rested by the glass-door opening into the garden. I burnt on a small table near her. A low candle carried me. Oh! marvellous luck for a candle-wick! to burn by clear daylight—to shine out in the gracious God's beautiful world! The warm breath of the south wind and the splendour

of the sunset lay in beauty over sea and land. The pointed summit of the mountain streamed in rosy light. The rugged rocks softened from the sun's sinking rays. The dying woman could here enjoy herself. The evening crimson and the warm air could not give her back life, but they breathed over her white sunken cheeks and wafted soft balm to her broken heart. The night of death was drawing near; the shadows of it already lay on her mouth and eyes, and had paled all colour from her face. In her heart there yet beat a warm pulse of life, and warm love streamed yet from her eyes. The old servant, who had carried me in, I watched walking noiselessly about. She opened the curtained window to the evening light. The sun's rays fell softly through the cypress and vine-boughs which shaded the window, and played on the coloured straw-mat which covered the floor. But they looked most bright and lovely where they fell on the golden curls of a child who rolled small marble balls over the matting, and shouted for joy. The old woman had placed me on the table where the invalid was writing. There she leant; her delicate

hand rested fatigued on the paper, and she leant her faded face on the cushion of the arm-chair. The large dark-blue eyes followed the child's movements with quiet pleasure, and as the old woman prepared to carry him away she pleaded, "Leave him yet a little with me, Bridget," in a weak, gentle voice. "He is so bright and so loving—he is always good when he is with me: the half-hour that the doctor allowed cannot yet be gone?" The old nurse said she had better take him into the garden, as the day had been too hot earlier. "But Walter will first kiss his dear mamma," said she, and placed the little one on the chair——Ha! what was that?' cried the Flame: 'more light here! I must find out.'

'What was it? what have you seen?' asked a Rush-blossom.

'Oh, those deep-blue eyes out there, on the other side of the bay! They looked at me from under the tree—the blue eyes I have longed to see—but now I see them no more.'

'We also see nothing,' said the Owlet. 'Go on! go on! you were dreaming.'

'There were tears in them,' said the Will-o'-

the-wisp; 'they shone towards me wide open, but full of pain and anguish.'

'You were dreaming—you were dreaming,' said the Reed-blossom. 'Go on and tell us at once what became of the sick mother and the little child.'

'The boy gave his little hand,' continued the Wandering Light, 'and put up his fresh little mouth to be kissed. The poor mother drew him to her. She took the little child's face in both her hands, buried her wan face in his golden curls, then hastily put him from her, and signed to the old woman to take him away. With streaming eyes she watched them as far as the bushes in the garden, when she quickly resumed her pen, and began again writing. I watched her—I shone over the paper, and read every word. I will tell you also what she wrote. Thus it ran,—"Sorrow not about me, about my heavy loss. The mourning for a dead, loved father is a blessed pain. When my God took my little first-born, that was also a blessed suffering; but I *then* thought that deeper woe must break my heart. I have since then learnt other woes, Ulrick; but

enough of this. You, my beloved brother! must now be the protector of my treasure—my Walter! I have not yet taught him to speak his father's name. If you will agree, Ulrick, that bitter name—his father's—must always remain a secret from him. But you will love him, will you not? You will be to him, Ulrick, what your dear little Hannah of old now begs, and you will love him for her sake? And also for Clement's sake, will you not, dear Ulrick? However justly angry you may feel towards him, and however great his guilt may be, he is still your brother. You have known him and loved him, and who that has once loved him—ah!—my little Walter, his son!—his son whom he has forsaken! You will spare him the bitterness of knowing and hearing of him? If there is a fervent prayer beating in my heart, it is,—Let my child be your son in his own, in every one's eyes. You will educate him simply—not as the rich heir of Nordingen, but to become an active, useful man. You will dedicate him to the Lord. And Ulrick, dear, dear Ulrick, hear still this prayer, forgive your brother—forgive my boy's

father! Let no ill-will against Clement dwell in the heart in which his son will find a refuge. And if *I* have forgiven him, who then has a right to be angry? Pray to God for mercy for him, Ulrick—he needs it. I always do so, I always pray for him. I know that my tears caused by him have fallen heavily and cry out against him before God's judgment-seat, and therefore I weep no more." From my position above I followed every motion of her writing—saw her often stop and rest. Now I saw heavy drops fall from her eyes on the last lines, which half erased them and gave them the lie. With her pocket-handkerchief the pale woman dried her eyes; she breathed with difficulty, and with trembling hand she wrote the last words,—"Ulrick, I can write no more; my strength is gone. Come soon, come very soon. I can wait no longer for you. My true, dear brother! God the Lord bless thee for the real love and comfort which I have ever found with you! May my son some day repay you! Pray for me, Ulrick; pray that my parting hour may be peaceful." She then signed her name, and folded the pages together.

With my hot flame she melted the wax and sealed the letter, and then took up the pointed extinguisher that hung at my small candlestick. I perceived—ah! woe is me! that I should die. But a clear child's voice called out, "Mamma, dear mamma!" and I saw the little boy climbing up by the stone steps at the open door. He had gathered up his little frock and filled it full of bright-coloured pebbles. In his hand he carried a bunch of wild meadow-flowers. His cheeks glowed, his curls waved in the evening air. Yes, the young mother then forgot to extinguish me; she stretched out both arms to the child, and the old nurse took him up and set him on the table before the invalid. Then she took up the candle and blew me out.'

As the Will-o'-the-wisp disappeared into the bushes, there glanced from the side where it had vanished a new slender Flame. It came slowly over the swamp, burnt bright and very steadily, and waited long at the little bay. The fireflies would have hailed it, but it waved them back, and in low tones it spoke, with whispering voice:—

'Be quiet, be quiet; ask me nothing. I can-

not reveal what you may not hear. It is the same room, the same bright marble walls, the same fine matting on the floor. The glass-door into the garden is fast closed—all sunlight—the hot May day—shut out. The dark window-curtains hang down to the ground, and prevent a single ray from entering. Only the cold stove-door is left open. Lazily the draught from there played with the curtains. Still, solemnly still, all else was. She also slept—that white wan woman—so peacefully and so calmly. Like pale marble lay she on the bed, wrapped in soft white folds. Two dark tresses fell on each side of the temples, shining like funeral ribbons. I watched near, on a high candelabra. It was so still—a deep silence reigned around. I heard only the deathwatch ticking in the carved frame of the mirror. The small lamp also on the chimney-piece crackled, and threw a small smoke-cloud in light wreaths through the room. I heard steps also at the entrance-door—wearily dragged feet, and the tripping footsteps of a child.

'The curtain was drawn. Sweet curly-head, what do you want here? She sleeps, she sleeps!

Do you want to see that sweet mother sleeping as she never slept before? Oh, leave her, leave her! She sleeps so quietly—so softly; do not disturb her—do not awake her. That is a deeper, calmer sleep. Still! oh, so still, so still!' And the Flame had passed, and disappeared into the forest.

'Did you hear the toad in the pond? Did you hear the owl in the thicket? It does one no good to hear such melancholy stories by night in the forest.' So spoke the Firefly. But the Water-lily begged,—'Oh, only one more story, let us hear. That small Flame has been playing so long among the roots of the trees, it must relate one to us.'

And the small Flame sprang up from the roots of the naked old stem and spoke:—'I feel cold—I feel cold in the damp moor. It is so open and free in the dark forest in the depth of night. Ah! free as a bird! You cannot understand how timidly the soul of a little light feels its liberty. Once I was struggling for life. There was one firm spot, one where I could sparingly nourish my tiny existence; viz. that on the long

wick of the wax taper. At that time I felt myself circumscribed, surrounded, and imprisoned. Now I look back with regret to the small wax taper, to the narrow wick, and I feel as if the battle for life had been a work full of charms. I feel afraid of this freedom without limit. I am afraid of losing myself. Who attends to my nourishment here? I live here—on what? Is it on recollections?'

'Tell us, then, of your recollections; relate to us about your circumscribed light,' begged the Water-lily and the Reed-blossom.

'Here comes a smell of morning,' said the Flame; 'the company of night-spirits must soon disperse: so listen to only a very short ending of wax-taper life.—The key turned in the lock, and the small door in the wall sprung open. An old woman carried me burning in her hand. A little boy held her tightly by one hand, and called over and over again, "Walter will come, too, into the little garret! Walter will come, too!" A dark room: chests and boxes standing about; an old trunk on heavy feet; on shelves in the wall, rows of books bound in parchment; broken

however, soon tired of this amusement, and came and stood by the old woman, watching her unpack the trunk. A packet fell out from the clothes: playing-cards were strewn over the floor. "Oh! pictures, pictures!" cried the child, collecting the coloured bits of cardboard in its pinafore; and he carried them all to a flat box. He had spread the cards out, and knelt before them, and played with them, chattering and laughing, with flushed cheeks and gleams of delight in his dark blue eyes.'

'Demons lurk in coloured playing-cards,' murmured a Forget-me-not.

'Then I heard steps,' continued the Flame. 'There entered the room a tall, grave man; deep lines of care were imprinted on his noble forehead and round his firm mouth; many early silver threads showed themselves amongst his dark hair. Sadly he looked at the things. As his glance fell on the child, he asked hastily,—"How came the child by those cards, Bridget?" The old woman told him. He sighed deeply and stepped up to the child. "You have not wished me good morning yet, Walter," said he.

"Good morning, dear papa," said the boy, without looking up. "Look at my beautiful pictures!" The "pictures are not yours, Walter," said the grave man: "you must give them all to your father." How disappointed the little one looked as he glanced up at him, but at the same time spread both his arms over the cards! "Oh, look, Bridget!" I heard the man say; "look! has not the child got exactly his mother's eyes?" And he bent again to the boy, gave his hand to him, and spoke firmly, but kindly: "Now give me the pictures, Walter!" Anxiously and sadly asked the little one, "Will you not rather have the cups and saucers, papa?" "No; I must have the pictures, my child, and at once." Then the child's face glowed a dark red, his eyes sparkled in anger, every feature in his small face quivered, and, shaking and quivering with wild impetuosity, he threw himself over the cards and cried, "No, no, I will not give up my pictures—my pictures!" The angry spirit of defiance was, I thought, a rare guest in the young child. The old nurse stood shocked, with upraised hands; the man himself had grown

white. However, he took up the screaming child from the ground, gave him to the old woman, and told her to take him away till he should be good again. Dark clouds swept over his white forehead as he gathered the cards together and shut them up. He took me off the shelf, and as he did so a drop of hot wax fell on his hand. He did not shrink. The hand bore a great scar, which must once have caused far greater pain. Sighing deeply he closed the door of the small room, and long, long he paced up and down; but at length his troubled gaze fell upon me, as I burnt forgotten on a side-table. He took me up and extinguished me.'

The little Wandering Light flew out into the night-air as far as he could. But far, far off, on the furthest edge of the haunted meadow, the fireflies saw yet many small flames dancing; but they no longer flew after them; they thought it time to whirl away and seek their green tents under the hazel-bushes on the brink.

The Professor Screech-Owl called to his niece the Owlet. 'We must not procrastinate,' he said to her, 'if we wish to find a respectable hole in

the rocks for the night. The morning is already breaking behind the hills, and that makes the roads unsafe.' They flew away, and the Bat took the hint to follow their example, and take the road home. The small Grass and Weeds had already sunk subdued under the last narrative of the Wandering Light; the poor Water-lily had become quite melancholy from all the sad stories she had heard: the heart of the flower was so heavy from sympathy, so sadly full, that it could not sleep. One loving, small wave took its tired head on its arm, and rocked it peacefully and softly as it glanced tremblingly up to the starry night-heavens.

And those earnest, blue child's eyes, that all the time so spirit-like and fever-burning had watched under the maple, were closed as the last will-o'-the-wisp flew away. Exhausted, he slept at last; unconsciously he had yielded to it. So, at last, all was still in the forest, and remained so till the wood-grouse called out from the thicket, and the morning sent its merry messengers, the winds, to make its road through fog and clouds—to make an entry for it in the

valley. Over the damp forehead of the young sleeper many cool airs had already wafted, but failed to wake him out of his deep sleep. At last, as the sun (which had already risen above the hills) broke through the clouds, with long streaks of rays, and shone between the birch-boughs, and greeted the quiet toad-pond so that its waters glittered tremblingly, then first the sleeper woke out of his dreams. He raised himself up, sat erect on the grass, shook himself doubtfully, and wondered. There lay the pond, the haunted meadow, the green fields beyond,—all as still and peaceful, as tranquil, as he had often seen them in bygone times. What had become so different in himself, that he could only look with pain at these green solitudes? No, no, away from here—amongst men—to his father. Father! oh, that word! He put his hands to his pale forehead, smoothed the damp hair from his face, and going after his straw hat, which had rolled away from him, he came down to the small bay. There floated the pure water-lily before him—how can I relate it?—he leant over the pond, reached with his stick the white

blossom out of the water, slung the long, pale stalk in his hat—the flower lay heavily over the edge. It seemed as if fairies had decorated the pale, fair boy. His dark-blue eyes shone dreamily under the entangled curls. He took up his stick, buttoned his coat over, and stepped wearily, with sunken head, towards his father's house.

* * * *

Again the night came down over the forest —a dark and moonless one—one of the last in July. But stars glimmered on high in the dark vault of heaven, and played, lightly trembling, reflected on the smooth surface of the toad-pond. Over the moor lay a heavy mist: the air was sultry. It was long since any refreshing rain had fallen, and the grasses and weeds, which drooped, thirsty, with tired heads, would willingly to-day have occupied themselves carrying water, and not grumbled over their hard work. They stretched and strained themselves to catch the scanty night-dew, with which they could just sustain their small lives. The St. John's exer-

cise was long over. Many of the insect regiments had left the wood, and were gone to their garrisons to receive new uniforms. The fireflies no longer swarmed in the bushes on the bank, and upon the surface of the toad-pond there floated no white water-lily. The place on the bank under the maple was empty, and the reeds round the edge were grown still higher, and stood yet thicker together. The old, bare oak-stem stood yet unchanged on the narrow tongue of land, and his thin arms were not yet tired of stretching threateningly on high above the pond. On one of his limbs the young owl had again established herself. She had returned with her uncle, the old horned owl, from their great Italian journey.

They had abandoned all idea of visiting Greece, as they had heard that disturbances had broken out there. But already, in Italy, they had gathered sufficient information about the almost extinct descendants from the owl of Minerva to employ ten lawyers for as many years in writing law-papers about it. The young owlet had written much on this journey, and

thought it necessary to keep a journal. A very touching love-episode with a young eagle formed part of her interesting narrative, which, like many love-episodes, in published or unpublished journals, had been played more in the fancy of the writer than in reality. This night, while 'Uncle Horned Owl' was visiting, in the corner tower of the old Manor-house of Nordingen, a friend of his youth, whom he had not seen for a long time, his high-born niece had flown to pay a visit to the toad-pond. She thought that the young water-lily and the other simple children of the still forest would like to listen to the account of her wanderings, and profit by the recital of scenes in the world. However, Miss Owlet found that four weeks are an age, and make a great difference in the outward life of flowers, fireflies, and blackberries. She sat on the oak-tree, and found herself vainly trying to create an interest with unknown acquaintance.

'Will it be as dull and tedious here to-day as it used to be?' sighed she to herself; and then she asked aloud,—'Is any one here who can tell me news of what has become of the

young water-lily that blossomed here in the small pool?'

Everything remained silent at this question; but the water in the pond stirred, and a small Wave swam to the tongue of land, drew itself up, dripping with water, to the gnarled roots of the old oak, and whispered in a soft voice,—'I can tell you about her; I can tell you. She has gone away—gone away with a young wanderer—a young wanderer!'

'What!' asked the young Owl, deeply interested, 'gone away with a young wanderer? Is that proper conduct for a quiet white water-lily, that was so innocent, only caring for humility and tenderness of feeling?'

The small Wave further related how it all had happened; how he himself had held the flower in his arms to the last, and lamented her with tears as the boy tore her away from him; how the stranger had carried her away from her water-home, and borne her off in triumph in his hat.

But the Owlet would not hear any more; she was too much shocked, and wandered away to-

wards the haunted meadow, where, just at this moment, a Wandering Light had begun his erratic dance.

'There is a more tolerably entertaining companion coming,' said she, and began to bow and greet them, and let her bright eyes roll and shine till they attracted the attention of the Will-o'-the-wisp, who came nearer. 'I have already met with many Wandering Lights here,' spoke the young Owlet: 'lights that have lived in the world, and could relate stories. Are you also a spirit of extinguished light, and can you also relate a story?'

'A spirit of light am I also,' answered the Will-o'-the-wisp. 'Stories I cannot relate; I can only tell you what I have seen, if you like to listen, though I think it is scarcely worth your hearing; but I see the Reed-blossom is bending down, and wishes also to hear. Very little of the world, or of mankind, have I seen. I have too recently entered into life, and have never been allowed to burn as I should have done. The poor old hands which lit me were covered with wrinkles,—hands which, in their long life,

had worked untiringly and honestly, which had often been folded in prayer. Also, you could read in the furrowed face, in the good, faithful eyes that looked down upon me as she lit me, how the long years of grief and suffering had engraved their traces there. The eyes that once had been bright had wept much; was it then any wonder that they had become dim, and that the old woman lighted me, though the sun was still above the mountain? Its slanting rays yet filled the room as she placed me on the table, and fastened me firmly in my candlestick, so that I should not flicker or run down. There I stood under the green shade of the study-lamp and listened. The old woman went away. As I did not care to examine the books and papers on the table, I allowed my glance to range wider. A comfortable, spacious apartment, many book-cases against the walls, also many pictures—many family portraits. To look at pictures takes up much time, so I shall not describe them to you, you clever, far-travelled bird!—not even the one where shone the sweet blue eyes of a lovely woman's face, already well

known to you. The great bay-window stood open; I saw the garden, forest, rocks, and mountains, and behind them shone the red-burnished, evening clouds. The old ivy had, for a long time, climbed over the window, and fastened itself round the wide bow in a fresh, dark wreath. The evening wind swept the young branches; and, half shaded by the green leaves, sat on the window-seat a slender boy, with fair curls of hair. Though the evening sun shone gloriously on the mountain the boy did not look out. His head lay on the breast of a tall man, who stood before him and held him in his arms. They spoke half aloud to each other. I listened, heard questions, sounds of grief, painful sighings, half-broken words, as out of an oppressed breast. Which was the most affected, the youth or that serious man? Which was the whitest?—Confession of a fault was whispered. What, then, had the poor boy done? only the avowal of some heavy sin could have shaken this strong man so deeply. "What! have you only *one* fault? Gambled! gambled—have you? Was that it?—you solemnly promised

your father never to touch a card, and this promise you have broken?" I saw the boy raise up to him his dark-blue, tearful eyes. "Father, father! you will really believe me that it was only this once?" "I believe you, my son," he answered; "I do believe you: it would be shocking if I could not do so." The boy whispered, "Oh, do not look away from me, dear father. I want to read in your eyes that you forgive me, that you believe me." The answer sounded earnest and solemn, "I believe you, and I forgive you this your first heavy transgression. However, it has wounded me deeply, Walter." "Ah, father, I feel so thankful that I have confessed all." And then he related how yesterday he had ran away to the mountain in the heavy rain because the other boys in the inn had played cards, and he was afraid he should be over-persuaded, and break his word once more. "I thank God, who gave you strength to fly the temptation," said his father. The boy seized his hand, and pressed it to his lips. "Oh, dear, dear father!" said he, softly; but gazed with puzzled look on an old, oft-seen scar on his hand. How

deadly pale the poor boy looked! I heard the question,—"Walter, are you ill?" "I do not know, father," he said; "my head aches sadly, but I have so much to think of. Ah! if I could only remember and tell you all that the Wandering Lights in the forest related." The man laid his hand on the boy's forehead: "Your head burns, my boy; the damp night-air in the forest has not done you any good." The old woman came in. She looked shocked, and sighed "Oh, how wild he looks! he is certainly ill. I saw it at once; he has taken the fever." "I am only cold," shivered the boy, and laid his head again on his father's shoulder. "Ah, the forest! the forest! Oh, if I could only tell you what I heard there! May I ask you one question, father?" "What?" said softly the grave man. "I should like to ask—should like to ask, father; and yet I dread the answer." Suddenly he raised himself up, and gazed at his father with searching, fixed eyes: "I want to ask you if you are really —really—my father? No, no! tell me nothing." He laid both his hands imploringly on the mouth of the pale man,—"I am so ill—I

cannot listen. Come, Bridget," said he, childishly, and stretched out his burning hand; "come and take poor little Walter to bed." Then they went. The master of the house took up the lamp and followed; and in the door the draught of wind blew me out.'

The Wandering Light was gone, the Reeds rustled, the Toads croaked in the pond, and the young Owlet pondered whether she should not fly to the Manor-house to fetch 'Uncle Screech-Owl;' but she already saw in the distance in the forest yet another Will-o'-the-wisp—a shining, large, full one. It floated nearer and nearer over the swamp. 'Stop, Wandering Light, stop!' cried the Owlet, as she watched it come to the pond, and she feared it might throw itself into the water and become extinguished.

'Yes; a Wandering Light! a Wandering Light!' it echoed back: 'only recently I shone a proud torch, and now I am a contemptible Will-o'-the-wisp on this witchlike moor!'

'Only recently a torch! how was that?' asked the Owlet.

'Would you like to hear how that was? Can you bear it? are you strong enough?'

'Oh, as to that,' said the Owlet, 'I can bear anything!'

'Well, but is it worth the trouble of telling you?' asked the Wandering Light again. 'Have you a heart? and is there feeling in it?'

The young Owl wished to take offence at this speech; but the Ivy-spray cried across the water, 'Tell us, dear Light, whatever it is that you have seen. I am not strong, but I can cling tightly, and that is the means by which we weak ones remain upright for so long, and can bear so much. Whether a feeling heart hears you, do not mind. A simple word, lightly floating away, seems to be so weak; but who can tell its secret effect? What I once hold, to that I cling firmly; therefore, men trust in my evergreen leaves, and have associated me with remembrance. Where old, half-fallen ruins tell of bygone times, there I cling willingly, and I will also preserve thy experience, and will relate the moral of it to mankind; that is,—Be true, and endure, and cling to each other.'

'Well said! Listen, then—listen,' spoke the Wandering Light. 'In the park the old elm-trees have defied the seasons, and stand yet upright and firm. But why did they whisper in the warm night-air, "Why do you disturb us? Why do you wake us at midnight from our deep dreams? Why are gleaming lights in the darkness of night? What is moving? Who is whispering? What is scratching in the old walls? Why glitter the candles? Why smell the flowers? The rooms are empty, the owners dead, the heir is distant; yes—empty, dead and distant." So whisper the elms in the dark park; and through the windows streams in the night; wide open stands the door on the terrace; wreaths of flowers hang over the doors, and flowers are strewn over the stone steps before the old Manor-house of Nordingen.'

'Were you really there? were you in the Manor-house of Nordingen?' asked the Owlet.

'Not yet, not yet!' spoke the Wandering Light; 'down in the valley, in the flower-garden of that small, old house, there were no bright windows. The hazel-boughs stretched their twigs

across; the ivy held it embraced on all sides—that was its faithful, dark friend. Twelve torches waited before the door; twelve young peasants from the valley bore those torches. The brightest one of all—that was I! who so bright, so streaming? and night over all, and the house and all around so dark! At the window at the corner of the house, on the ground-floor, there glimmered a dim light. The dark Ivy-spray knocked lightly on the panes of the glass, and I asked it, "Tell me, what do you see within? what have you seen within during the past week?" But the branches waved hither and thither, and nodded, "Ask not! ask not!" Then the door opened, and a corpse was carried out. Old men with grey hair carried it; tenants of Nordingen had begged this favour that they might carry the corpse. And closely behind the body walked a tall, pale man, in black priest's dress, supporting an old, bent woman. I heard him say, "Come here, Bridget; lean on me: it is too much for you alone;" and the poor old woman put her trembling arm in his, and through her tears she looked gratefully up at him. Still

and dark was the night; the frightened jackdaws fluttered in the dark gable; in the old fountain the water dripped monotonously, splashing sadly into the wide basin. So the train set out; preceding and by the side of the corpse went the torch-bearers, then came the body, and just behind followed the dark forms of the mourners. The night-shadows rushed terrified asunder, where wild streams of torchlight shone on them; but it lighted not the sad shadows on the white faces of the mourners. Through the meadows where the willows stand, over the stone bridge, across the brook to the edge of the forest, we went—the bright torches and the dark corpse. We wafted sparks of light into the neighbouring forest; squirrels came and peeped at us inquisitively. I saw also a couple of young roes standing and looking through the bushes. Yet once more we crossed the brook over a tottering bridge of birch-stems, and came to the back-entrance of the park. The lime and plane-trees waved with a light wind; their tops rustled a greeting as the funeral train proceeded through the avenue. From afar the house greeted us

with bright candle-rays; near, the elms greeted us with woeful whispering in the darkness. On the terrace the household and many of the inhabitants of the valley were assembled, and they bowed their heads silently as the corpse was carried up the stone steps and through the open door. The torch-bearers remained without, and I with them. I could, however, see through the open door into the great hall. I saw the corpse placed on an elevated spot; laurels and flowers, and the true provost ivy, were strewn over it. I saw the tall man in priest's dress enter and bend over the corpse. He groaned deeply and heavily, as if a load of misery oppressed him. Tears and grief appeared on all faces, only not on the wondrously beautiful one of a young girl in a white dress, that shone from a bright frame down from the wall. Corn-blossoms ornamented her brown curls, and a sweet, childlike mirth lighted her blue eyes. I saw yet that from this picture hung long streamers of black crape, and also that some one had placed over it a wreath of white mallow. The doors were closed. That old Manor-house had received its last owner. In

the coffin had he been carried in, and in early morning, from those old walls to the last resting-place in the small churchyard where his ancestors sleep, will the young heir be carried. We torches had performed our last sad duty, and were extinguished.'

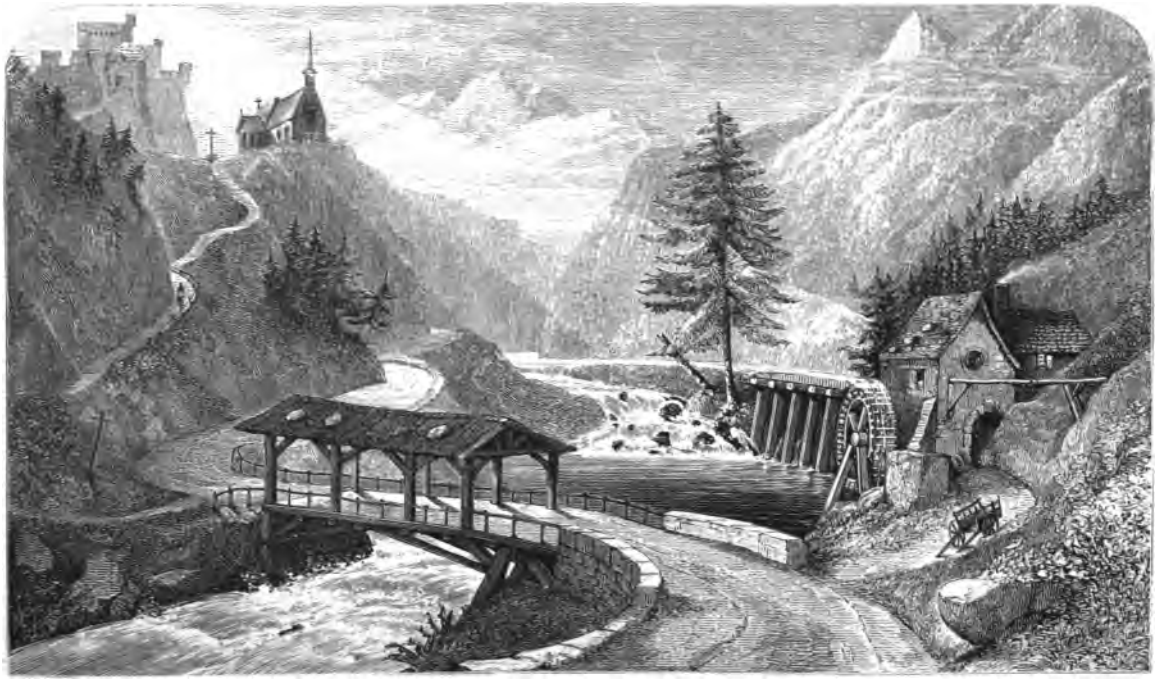
'Where are your sisters remaining?' cried the young Owl. But the Wandering Light did not answer, and swept slowly away over the haunted meadow. It seemed to the Owlet as if beyond, where the large oaks overshadowed the moor, that the other flames waited; but it was too far for her to distinguish them, and they did not come nearer. Then she took a sudden resolve, spread her wings, and without a word of adieu to the indulgent old oak-stem, or to the friendly pool at its foot, she flew away to the mountains. A light whisper rang through the ivy-leaves as the morning sent its first streams of light into the valley. The forest stood forth green and dew-refreshed to greet it. The tree-tops stood upright, and a mysterious whispering ran through the twigs. The wild duck, that had built her cool summer nest in the rushes, guided

her brood the way to the pond, to begin the day with a swimming-lesson. The reed-blossoms nodded a good morning to each other, and wondered that, on a green spot in the shade under the maple, a lordly, blue clock-blossom had bloomed overnight on a tall, slender stem, where yesterday no leaves or bud had showed. The toad called loudly from the pond. The small church of Nordingen had this night pealed a full and echoing clang through the valley, falling sadly on the ear like the chime of the sea-waves, when they through storm and night bring broken fragments of shipwrecked lives to the beach. But now holy and godlike, like the same sea in a calm, the funeral bells rang from the old church in the morning air. As the last sounds died away, a rustling was heard through the bushes that skirt the forest on the upper height of the mountains, and a youthful wanderer stepped with quick, hurrying feet out upon the high-springing mountain brow. The boy's light hair fluttered in the morning wind; his cheeks glowed with happy expectation. He looked around, and the joy-light in his eyes began to fade away; an

atom of happy illusion had already fallen. But he took the light hat from his head, wiped his heated brow with his pocket-handkerchief, laid stick and bag on the ground, and settled himself to wait. But in order that one might wait here a long while, the sun should not shine so burning on the rocks. The pleasure he expected from the valley must have been very great. At last he sprang up; he gazed down into the valley; he went a few steps down and returned; he clambered up some rocks to gain a more extended view, and his heart began to beat more uneasily, and his glance became sadder the oftener he looked at his watch. But now, look! two dark specks far away on the winding-path through the cornfields. That must be the path that leads up here, and those two figures must be—Walter and his father. They came nearer; they turned to the left—what could that mean? Ah, no! they were early reapers going to their work. Yes, it was now harvest-time, and the poor boy had not remembered that God the Lord can call His harvest at all times, and can cut the green ears also. A post-horn sounds.

Oh, already—already! He took up his hat and bag, and his light stick, and with bowed head he went slowly back into the forest. The sun rose higher and higher. The blanched stems of grass trembled in the hot air on the upper mountain range. In the still forest below, now and then, a fir-cone fell down, or a squirrel rustled through the foliage. The valley lay still and tranquil, with its green tree-tops and golden corn. No sound rang upwards from thence; but high above, in the blue heavens, there soared a small lark, and warbled—and warbled.

PRINCESS ILSE.



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PRINCESS ILSE.

AT the Deluge, when all the waters of the sea ran together, and had poured over the mountains, and let their wild waves roll over the highest summit, there was a great confusion amid the waters; but the Lord at last took pity upon the poor earth, and He let the clear light of heaven break through the grey cloud covering, and He commanded the waters to divide and to seek their way home into their valleys. Then would indeed no brook or stream have found its old course again, if there had not been legions of good angels sent down to earth to guide them in the right way.

As the long range of the tall mountain-summits raised themselves out of the flood,

the angels descended on their tops, and stepped from all sides slowly down into the valleys, driving the waters before them. As they descended deeper and deeper, they brought order into the course of brooks and streams, made the boundaries of the sea, and enclosed the lakes with their chains of rugged mountains; or else in green forests and broad meadows they worked with broad wind-brushes, made of sun's rays, over the wet surface of the earth, brushed the slime off the grasses, dried the damp foliage of the trees, and were so busy about it that clouds of water-dust, which they had stirred up, hung like airy fog-veils in the clefts of the hills.

The work had already lasted several days, and was near its completion, as a tired Angel sat resting on the summit of one of the highest mountains of the Hartz. He had from thence an extensive view over north and south, over east and west, and at last he looked thoughtfully down on the green earth which had been raised so bright and youthfully fresh out of its bath of expiation. 'How lovely she is!' he thought; 'how refulgent

in her innocence! Will she long remain thus pure? Will all the misery of sin, and all the stain of sin, which have taken so much water to wash away—will they never return again? Will crimes again with their black fingers soil the blooming face of the cleansed earth?' A deep sigh full of heavy presentiment heaved the breast of the good Angel, and he raised his eyes up to the morning sun, which was rising blood-red above the horizon. He gazed long towards that side from whence the German streams were flowing. He saw them glittering in the distance: the large principal rivers far forward, the smaller following them, and a whole host of satellites, consisting of small brooks and streams, merrily hastening after. He rejoiced to see how carefully they were guided, how all confusion was avoided, and how no spring, however diminutive and insignificant, was without its guiding angel to lead it again to the right path, if delaying and irresolute it strayed on one side, and to watch carefully if it fell too awkwardly and imprudently over the edge of the rocks. He saw the joyful Rhine, with a full crown of vines on its head, hastening restlessly along; and he

imagined also in the distance that he heard the rejoicings with which he greeted his beloved Moselle, as she, with her locks also interweaved with vine-branches, blushingly stepped forward to meet him.

Farther and farther the waters ran away, their rushing and dashing died off in the distance, and the lonely Angel on the summit of the mountain found his ear suddenly attracted by other sounds. It was a low, deeply painful weeping and splashing, quite close to him; and as he rose up and stepped round the rock from whence the sound appeared to come, he found lying on the ground, wrapped in a white veil, a young stream, who was crying bitterly. Compassionately he bent over it; and, as he set it upright and raised its veil, he recognised it as the small Ilse, for whom a green bed was ready prepared in the valley of the Hartz. 'Poor child!' said the good Angel, 'are you the only one left behind on the bleak mountain? Are all the others gone away, and did none of them remember to take you with them?' The small Ilse raised her head proudly up and said quite nippily,

'*Forgotten* I have most certainly not been! The old Weser waited and nodded and beckoned long enough for me to come with her—and Ecker and Ocker wished to take me; but I would not go with them—certainly not! even if I should perish up here. Should I fall into the valley below like any vulgar brook, to run for common use through the plain, to give drink to the sheep and oxen, and wash their clumsy feet?—I, the Princess Ilse! Only look at me, whether I am not of most noble parentage. The sunbeam is my father, and the clear air is my mother; my brother is the diamond, and the dew-drops in the rose-buds are my dear little sisters. The waves of the Deluge have wafted me up here. I have washed in the snow summit of the primitive rocks, and the first sunbeam which pierced the morning mists embroidered my dress with spangles. I am a Princess of the highest rank, and positively will not descend into the valley. Therefore I hid myself up here, and pretended to be asleep, till the old Weser, with the stupid rivulets who did not know any better than to throw themselves into her arms, had at last to

go grumbling away.' The Angel shook his head sadly at the long harangue of little Ilse, and looked earnestly and scrutinisingly in her white face; and as he gazed anxiously and long into the wide-open blue eyes, which to-day shone with tiny sparks of rage, he saw moving in their clear depths dark spots, and he knew that an evil spirit held its sway in the small head of the little Ilse. The demon of Haughtiness was there, and had driven out all the good, gentle thoughts, and now he gazed defiantly at the good eyes of the Angel out of the eyes of poor little Ilse. The demon of Pride had already turned the head of many a foolish child, even if it was not a princess of the highest rank; and the pitying Angel, who understood the peril of the poor little stream, wished to save it at any price.

In his eyes, which gazed so deeply into hers, the Princess Ilse was nothing but a naughty child, and therefore he did not address her as 'Highness,' or 'Serene Highness,' but quite plainly as 'Dear Ilse.' 'Dear Ilse,' said the Angel, 'if you are determined of your own free choice to remain up here, and think it beneath your dignity to flow

into the valley like the other streams and rivers, you must make up your mind to be contented up here, and I cannot understand why you have made so much fuss about it, so many cries and complaints.'

'Oh!' said the child Ilse in answer, 'when the waters went away, dear Angel, the Storm-wind came up here to sweep the mountain, and when he found me here he was quite in a rage, —he scolded and quarrelled, and shook me, and wished to throw me from the cliff into a deep black cavern, where never a ray of daylight can shine. I begged and cried, and shrunk trembling against the points of the rock. I was lucky enough at last to escape from his strong arms, and to hide myself here in this rocky corner.'

'But perhaps you will not always be so lucky,' said the Angel, 'for the Storm-wind keeps strict order up here, and carries a strong broom, —so, do you not see, dear Ilse, that it was foolish in you to remain here alone; and now, will you not follow me, if I lead you to the good old Weser and your young companions?'

'Certainly not,' cried the little Ilse; 'I will remain up here. I am a Princess.'

'Ilse,' said the Angel with his mild soft voice, 'dear little Ilse, I love you, and you must also show a little love for me, and be a good child. Do you see out there the pale morning clouds sailing in the blue heavens? I will call them here to take us up, and we will both step into them. You will lie down on your white pillow, and I will sit near you, and thus the clouds will carry us swiftly into the valley where the other streams have gone. There I will place you in your green little bed, and I will stop by you, and show you coloured dreams, and relate to you fairy tales.'

But the Princess Ilse was immovably firm; she cried out still more haughtily and insolently, 'No, no, I will not go down! I shall not go down!' And as the Angel came nearer and wished with gentle force to take her in his arms, she sprang up and splashed him in the face with water.

The Angel sat down sorrowfully on the ground, and Princess Stubborn crept again into

her rocky cleft and congratulated herself that she had shown so much firmness of character; and when the Angel once more stepped up to her, and sought to persuade her to go with him, she only gave him short, flat refusals.

The kind Angel at last perceived that with all his good intentions he had no influence over little Ilse, and that the demon of Pride had taken possession of her mind. He wandered, sighing, from the lost child, and sought his companions who were busily employed down below.

But when Princess Ilse found herself, at last, again alone on the mountain summit, she wished to enjoy her grandeur. She came forward out of the rock cleft, sat down on a prominent cliff, spread her vapoury garments round her in wide folds, and waited to see if the neighbouring mountains would not bow down before her, and the clouds come and kiss her dress. But nothing of the kind happened, though her little Highness put on her haughtiest air; and at last she found the long waiting most tedious and wearisome, and began to feel the time most woefully long.

She sighed softly to herself,—'I should not have minded a little *ennui*, for that is quite suitable to my rank, but anything so dull as this not even a Princess should have to endure.' It was now already evening, and the sun had sunk down, and from afar the coming of the Storm-wind was heralded. Then the poor stream wept anew hot tears of anxiety; but even though she was so pleased with her own firmness, and was glad that she had not followed the Angel, yet the sweet self-satisfaction could not quite overpower the dread of the Storm-wind. It became darker and darker; heavy damp clouds rose up from the ground, hollow thunder rolled below, and little Ilse thought she must perish of unspeakable anguish. Her breath failed in the heavy hot air that suddenly blew towards her. All of a sudden a faint ray of light shot through the dark night, and as the stream glanced up with fright, there stood a tall dark man before her, wrapped in a dark red mantle, who, bowing deeply, said, 'Most gracious princess!' Such a greeting was sweet music to the ears of little Ilse, and she conquered her dislike to the strange gloomy figure, and

listened to the seductive words with which he addressed her.

The dark man told her that he had long been near her, and had heard her conversation with the Angel, and was delighted that she had sent him about his business. He could not understand how anyone could expect so much loveliness and charm, such a wonderfully beautiful princess, to drag herself on the earth and bury herself in the dark valley! He pointed to her the shining future which awaited her if she would only allow him to be her slave. He told her about his gay country-seat on one of the highest and most magnificent mountains of Germany. There he would carry her, and there she would find herself surrounded by a brilliant court, with all the grandeur and splendour imaginable, and to which her proud rank entitled her. In pleasure and joy she should reign, high above all the streams and springs of earthly ground.

The heart of little Ilse beat with joyful expectation at these charming promises. And then the man drew aside his mantle, and took

out a broad gold shell, which had skilfully worked feet, and was set with dazzling precious stones; and this shell he placed before her, and begged the sweet Princess to step into it, that he might carry her to his beautiful Brockenberg, where countless servants would prepare the joyous feast for her. Then all doubt and hesitation quickly vanished. In joyful haste she gladly put both her feet into the golden shell; so quickly that the water splashed up, and a few drops fell on the hand of the dark man, where they hissed and quickly evaporated, while a burning pain ran through the limbs of the little Ilse.

Frightened, the poor child seized the edge of the shell, as if she would willingly jump out again, and she glanced up in the face of the man. He, however, only laughed at it, seized the shell in his powerful hand, ordered the Storm-wind to go before them, so that little Ilse should not be afraid that he would overtake them; and away they went through the air as quickly as a dart. The small stream, who had soon forgotten her pain, had been calmed, and gladly let herself be

carried on. She did not suspect that she had given herself to a demon. Perhaps at times she felt a little anxious, as she floated through the dark night; and when the shell was tossed about by the rapid movement little Ilse trembled, and, crouching quite flat on the golden floor, she drew her garments tightly round her, and took care that not a drop of water was splashed: she knew well now what pain that was.

The night got brighter, and the moon slowly rose up, as they at last arrived at the Brocken.* Wild rejoicings and singing were heard. A

* 'This mountain of the Brocken is very famous, not only throughout all Germany, but also in foreign parts. It is 3300 feet high. There goes a story, which even the children hereabouts will tell you, that in the night of the first of May the witches in Germany assemble, and, in company with some infernal spirits, celebrate a feast and ball there. It is situated in the Upper Hartz, not far from the Castle of Ilsenburg, where the Count of Stolberg keeps his court, about thirty English miles from Nordhausen. On the top of the Brocken you see a spring of a clear and well-tasted water. It is admirable to find a well upon so high a mountain: how this comes to pass is not yet agreed upon by the learned.'—DR. BEHRENS' *Natural History of the Hartz Forest*, A.D. 1730.

motley crowd of strange forms floated promiscuously to and fro. The Lord of the Brocken, however, commanded silence. He placed the shell, with the little Ilse, on a large flat stone, like a throne, and then ordered his strange followers to make a broad circle round her, and do homage to the water Princess.

That was indeed a delightful moment to little Ilse; she felt at last that she was properly appreciated. Haughtily she drew herself up, and rose high with dignity, like a slender fountain-nymph, out of the golden shell, bowing and greeting graciously on all sides. Then, as a loud murmur of admiration ran through the wondering circle, she sank abashed, half down.

However, this was no time for the child Ilse to feel humility, when the demon of Haughtiness had possession of her. A sweet bewitching strain of music rang out, and the delighted little Ilse stepped dancing and sparkling here and there in the shining shell, tossed and waved her curly head, and let the clear pearl drops fall ringing in circles in the golden dish. The good full moon, who is not over-particular, and

shines alike over all that comes beneath it, good or evil, could not resist placing on the head of the vain child an ornamental little crown of sparkling silver stars, and it opened its wide mouth yet twice wider with pleasure when the sweet child looked up and nodded to it, and laughed gratefully. But not every eye in the demon's court circle looked with favour and pleasure on the dancing of little Ilse. There were many young witches in the company who thought themselves much more charming and beautiful than the water Princess, and now with bitter envy and anger saw another fêted. Two of these young witches approached the golden shell, and made game to each other of little Ilse.

'She dances very prettily, and turns and twists,' said one; 'but at the same time she is so thin one might blow through her. I should like to see how the delicate beauty will look, if she has to dance with the Whirlwind, when he seizes her and shakes her as he does us.'

'Miserable creature!' cried the other, and shrugged her shoulders scornfully; 'she will

never be able to learn in the riding-school how to sit on a broom-stick! Do you not hear how joyfully the kettle-drums sound, and the cymbals are playing? We will go and dance a mad measure, and stamping on the ground we will make a deep quagmire, in which the elegant Ilse shall dwell. Then there will be an end of her high-mightiness, and she must become our humble servant, the Princess Boiling-water!'

Little Ilse had overheard all, and she lost all pleasure in the dance, after the wicked jeers of the witches. She sat quietly down on the floor of her shell, and watched all the wild figures hurrying to the other side of the mountain, where they arranged themselves for a dance. She wondered to herself what the mocking world of the cruel witches meant. The sarcasm about the storm-wind had already deeply displeased her, but the quagmire and the Princess 'Boiling-water' remained a great mystery to her. No one had ever called her such a name before, and she, who had been brought here to reign, would never in any likelihood become the servant of the witches. She thought she had better ask

information from the Lord of the Brocken, who was approaching her; but before she had time to speak a word he stood before her, and lightly touching the golden shell with his finger, he made little Ilse quiver with pain. The demon only laughed and said,—

'The night is fresh, gracious Princess; you must find yourself cold, and no doubt feel chill in this flat dish. I have given orders that a warm swinging bed shall be made over a fire—there you can rest and warm yourself. If your Highness will deign to turn your star-shining head to the other side, you will observe how my old head court-cook is busily stirring up the fire, and also how she is placing pretty toys by the bedside, that you may not find the time tedious. Come, and let me carry you away from here!'

The little Ilse glanced on one side and saw that they had hung a great black cauldron over a roaring fire, that glared and flamed out of the ground. The old woman who stood by it seemed to her horrible and frightful, and the playthings she threw in the cauldron so curious, that little Ilse (who had become very mistrustful) felt no

inclination to descend, and said she would prefer watching the dance a little longer. The cold she did not mind, as she sat in the golden shell as high and comfortable as if it were a balcony, and she was out of the way of dust that might annoy her; and being up so high she could overlook everything, and was very much amused. The demon observed that he would not disturb her pleasure just now, but he would return in an hour and carry her off. Saying this he went away, and joined the dance below.

However, the pleasure of the Princess was not real, when she was left sitting there alone, and first looked at the wild group of whirling dancers, and then glanced at the fire and the cauldron, into which she distinctly saw the old woman throw loathsome beasts, spiders, toads, snakes, and lizards—bats, which she caught in the air, and first cut off their wings before she threw them, with wild gestures, into the cauldron. A deep terror overcame little Ilse when she saw the wicked company in which she found herself, and when she thought that soon she would be put in the kettle and warmed up. Then it ap-

peared clear to her what the witches meant when they had ridiculed her and called her Princess 'Boiling-water.' In almost a death-agony she clenched her tender hands together, and crushed her veil against her white face, to drown the cry which burst forth from her loaded breast. 'Oh,' sighed she through her tears, 'had I but followed the Angel! he meant everything for my good;' and as she glanced round in her despair, and saw that she was left quite alone on this side of the mountain, as all the witches and demons were dancing together, or crowding round the fire, warming themselves, there came to her suddenly the thought of escape. 'Away, away!' she whispered; 'no matter where!' and swiftly as the thought was expressed, she had already stepped on the edge of the shell, and slipped her white feet over it. Then drawing her transparent garment round her, she hung with both hands, while she glanced anxiously round to see if any one had observed her.

They had no thought or care for the little Princess; only the good old moon stood over and laughed unmoved at her. But she glanced

up at it with her streaming eyes, which pleaded so innocently, and placed her little finger on her mouth. It certainly would not have had the heart to betray her, if any one had asked it where the little Ilse had gone.

In the mean time, little Ilse saw that no one was watching her; so she dropped quietly down, and tried to glide quite softly and lightly on to the ground. But the shell was high, and the block of granite on which it stood was still higher; and though the little one took every care, yet she could not help splashing a little as she came on the ground, and in great terror lest any one should have heard her, she slipped behind some large rocks. Her star-crown she had wisely taken off and left in the shell. Royalty had brought her but little pleasure, and now she wanted no longer to be a princess, only to creep away unseen and undisturbed.

Trembling the stream trickled over the rocks, and begged that they would protect her; and the old rock, who had never felt such a young throbbing life on its hard breast, found itself wonderfully moved, and pressed itself so close

to the Princess that no eyes, not even those of the moon, could espy her. And then he showed her on the ground a small hole; and she made herself as slender as she could and slipped in, and found on the soft earth pillow, which clothed the rocky skeleton of the mountain on each side, a long path, which had originally been dug by a field-mouse. The small Ilse groped about in the darkness, and felt that the channel gradually went down-hill. She had already crept a long distance in it when she found that the way widened and became uneven. It appeared to lead between loose rocks. Stones were dislodged from beneath her feet, and rolled before her into the abyss. Yet still she glided on in deep darkness, but from time to time through the stones she felt a sharper draught of air; and as the path, after becoming steeper and more abrupt, appeared altogether to cease, suddenly the rocks above her opened, and she saw the clear night heaven, with a few shining stars still sparkling in it. They shed a faint light, and showed her a confused mass of great and small stones, over which she could not see any way.

At the same instant the wild music, the screeching and whistling, of the dancing witches on the Brockenberg, sounded in her ears; and the small Ilse, who had only hesitated for a moment, and did not know which way her path led, startled by these sounds, jumped up in fear, and in breathless haste sprang and jumped over the rocks. She did not care that she fell on the hard flint rocks, and struck her head and tore her garments. 'Away! away!' she whispered; 'far away; where neither the Prince of the Brocken nor any of his wild followers can stop me!' The dawning morning light made her very anxious. 'The night is quiet and silent, and will not betray me,' she thought: 'but the wakening day will soon enough show where I am running.' And she crouched down and slipped away under the stones, and only every now and then came up to take a draught of morning air.

A deep, dark-green ravine, between high wooded mountains, sank into the valley below, and down this the little Ilse was rashly running. Jagged pieces of rock rolled down from the

mountain, and lay crumbling in the ground of the ravine, firmly grasped by the roots of the fir-trees, and covered with moss. They lay there dark and venerable, and did not seem inclined to get out of the way of the little stream, which sprang so hastily and unceremoniously over them. The good Father had pitied little Ilse, as she, tormented by fear, dashed over the rocks; and He had allowed the forest to open its green doors and take her in its arms. The forest is a holy place of refuge for erring children, who, in wandering through the world, have thought or done evil. None of the demon tribe, who hunt for young souls, can enter into the friendly quiet of the still forest. The demon of Haughtiness, above all, must always remain without. How could such a bad spirit exist before the severe grandeur of the forest king, the fir-tree? who was not proud or arrogant of the strength and splendour with which God had endowed him; who, raising his lofty head to heaven while the storms blew round him, stood firm and unchanged on the spot on which God had placed him, and would rather have broken and died

than be bent. So perfect a king he was by the grace of God.

The child Ilse did not yet understand all this; it only seemed to her that the roots of the fir-trees made ugly faces at her, and she slipped timidly past and flew along deeper and deeper into the forest. The little Ilse did not know that the demon of Haughtiness had left her as she escaped from the demon and his witches on the Brocken, that he had been floated away in the tears of repentance and anguish which she had wept. All this the little Ilse knew as little, as she had not noticed in her carelessness when the demon entered her head. But she felt herself freer and safer in the shadow of the green forest, under the golden trellis which the sun's rays threw obliquely over the turf. The farther she travelled from the Brocken the better and happier her mind became. The firs, thought she, do not frown any longer as darkly and severely as before; and soon noble, magnificent oaks stretched their giant arms protectingly over her, and light, friendly bushes, peeping between the black firs, nodded smilingly to her, and en-

deavoured first to imprison the bright sunbeams with their outstretched twigs, and then to throw them from one to another like golden arrows. The little Ilse, who had soon forgotten her sorrow, ran prattling happily between them; and when a sunbeam in the merry game fell to the ground, she jumped up and caught it, and held it laughingly on high, or fastened her veil with it, and threw it afterwards, as she jumped forwards, with a nod to the flowers and grasses that stood in her way watching her with curiosity. She was once more a happy, frolicsome child, and the green forest rejoiced over the little fugitive to whom it had given shelter. As for the large and small rocks, which, rolled up in their mossy dresses, lay dreaming on the ground, they, indeed, were disturbed in their peaceful slumbers when little Ilse sprang over them, dancing and jumping; but they were nevertheless good friends with her. Where the heaviest and largest stood awkwardly in her way, and would not let her run past them, she caressed the rugged cheeks of the old rocks with her white hands, and whispered soft pleadings in their ears. And

if that would not prevail with them, she pretended to be cross, stamped impatiently with her feet, and pushed so violently against them, that the old rogues began to give way; and when a very narrow opening became free before her, she rushed in with all her strength, pushed the lazy rocks asunder, and shot onwards—wild and free! Where the hollow path fell steep and rugged, it was delightful to see how gracefully the little Princess splashed from crag to crag. She decorated herself with a soft, white foam-cap, and when that became torn and crushed at one sharp rock point, at the next she found a new one at hand, white as Alpine snow and fresh crimped. On many of the sunny slopes of the mountain the grass and moss grew luxuriantly; where the forest trees stood wide apart from each other and had left them a small space, they stood in groups together, and learnt to grow and become almost like trees. There sat the young fir-trees, spreading their stiff, little, green dresses around them on the turf, shaking their pointed little heads thoughtfully to and fro, and wondering that little Ilse did not get

tired of running and jumping. The smallest streams, however, that had only just learnt to run alone, were not at all of the same mind as the young fir-trees. As they heard little Ilse splashing her sweet melody, they came out of the stone clefts on the rocky ways, dripping and sliding softly through the moss, nearer and nearer towards Ilse. She heard their soft purling, and saw them coming, and beckoned them to hasten. But when the little springs saw the small Princess so far down below, skipping over the rocks, they remained, timidly stopping, not venturing to jump down, but yet not able to find any other path. Then Ilse enticed them with her bell-like voice, spoke encouraging words, and showed them the strong stone edge of the bank, covered with pillows of soft moss, over which they could slip down to her. And the little springs took heart, and clambered and sprang quite fearlessly from one green bank to another. Little Ilse caught them when they awkwardly splashed into her lap, and took them by their hands and said, 'Come, now you shall run with me; attend to what I tell you, do as I do, and jump always

when I jump. I will take care that you do not tumble.' And the little springs did as they had been ordered, and skipped, holding by Ilse's hand, over the great rocks—did not hurt themselves, and were not frightened; and at last they learnt to jump and run so well, that when they also put on white foam-caps they could not be distinguished from little Ilse.

But the Demon of the Brocken was deeply annoyed at the flight of the Princess. He knew well that such a bright pure spring was no easy prey for him, and the demon of Haughtiness (who is the readiest tool to employ to catch young souls) had already departed. How could he then succeed in entrapping the airy sprite? He suddenly remembered the Storm-wind, of which the little Princess was so frightened, and he called to the North-wind, and commanded him to blow along the valley against the rapid-running little Ilse. Thus he thought he would force her to return, and so drive her back to the Brocken.

The North-wind gave himself every trouble to try and fulfil the bidding of the demon. He did

his best with blustering, howling, and crackling; he shook the trees till he bowed them to the roots, and strewed their broken branches on the ground just at the feet of little Ilse. A young fir, which had not yet got firmly rooted, he upset and threw across her way; he seized her waving veil, and wished to stop her by force, and take her with him. The little Princess, however, tore herself free, and did not mind how much of her veil was left behind in the hands of the North-wind. She never thought or cared for herself now, she only sorrowed from her heart over the fate of her beloved trees, and would willingly have battled for them against the storm, if she had only been able. She stepped pityingly up to the prostrate fir-tree, threw herself over it, over-streamed it with her tears, and compassionately washed its wounds. The little green twigs and small oak-boughs, which the North-wind threw in her path, these she gathered up tenderly in her soft arms, kissed their faded leaves, and carried them a little way with her, till she laid them at last to sleep on a bed of swelling moss.

And the demon stood all this time on the Brocken, and gnashed and ground his teeth as he saw how powerless the North-wind was against little Ilse. 'Now I will send the Winter against her,' murmured he to himself. 'He shall bind her and carry her in fetters—the desolate grey Winter—with hunger and cold, with long dark nights, when temptation is awake and sins creep on their secret way. Winter has already brought me several souls, and he surely will be able to overpower the slender Princess. You North-wind that roars yonder, exert yourself and do not cease; shake the leaves from the trees, and prepare the way for Winter. You know he will not come till he can rattle with his heavy chains through the decayed foliage.'

And the North-wind, like an obedient servant, rioted wild and icy through the valleys. The beech-trees stood trembling and frozen, and let their golden leaves with fear fall to the ground; the tops of the oaks shone red with the cold, stripped of even the last leaves from their twigs, and anxiously watched with naked branches the coming Winter approach. Only the fir-trees

stood calm, and wore unaltered their dark-green regal mantles. Little Ilse could not understand what would be the end of all this, and she scolded angrily up to the trees. 'Why, you mad trees, what is the matter with you? Why do you fling your dead leaves in my face? Do you no longer love your little Ilse, and will you blind her with brown acorns and hard beech-nuts?' Scornfully the little one sprang away, and shook the dry leaves out of her curls and out of the shining folds of her dress.

Winter had in the meantime arrived on the Brocken, and was dressed by his demon majesty himself with the thickest fog-mantle. After that he stepped slowly over the heights and rolled himself into the valley below. At first he was not very severe; he made himself velvet fingers like cats' paws, and wished to make himself agreeable; he decorated the trees and shrubs with sparkling dresses of white rime-frost, that little Ilse was quite blinded with their splendour, and did not know which way to look. After came the snow-flakes, whirling through

the air, and the Princess imagined at first that it was the clouds themselves, who wished to visit the valley and renew their acquaintance of the Alpine heights. When the Winter, however, laid his cold, white covering, thicker and thicker over the whole deep valley, when everything was buried under it—rocks and tree-roots, moss and weeds, and even the trembling, pale grass-blades —then little Ilse became anxious in her heart, and she thought, would this fate now come also over her? It made her very unhappy that she could not see her beloved green; and when she worked industriously, and tried to sweep away the snow from all the rocks she could reach, and free the small mosses, then she felt with terror, sharp, icy points penetrate her tender limbs, and saw how Winter forged hard, glittering rings of chain on the rocks which she passed by. She dreaded that the sharp icicles, which grew longer and longer, would hold and bind her, and entirely imprison her young white limbs in fetters. Now the grim Winter seized the poor child with still sharper, frostier claws; cold shudders ran through her as she clung

tremblingly to the knotty roots of the fir-trees, and glanced appealingly up to the forest king.

She saw him wrapped also in the white covering of winter; but she saw on his branches under the cold snow a deep, eternal green, shining, and the soft spring sunshine laid itself warmly and soothingly on its breast, and breathed into it strength and new life.

'Oh, fir-tree!' cried little Ilse, 'how do you manage to brave the winter, and still remain green and lifelike in his icy arms? Can I not also learn how?'

Then the Fir-king spoke: 'A wise man built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. But the foolish man built his house upon sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it. I was planted on the rock, and raised my head to heaven: the Lord has given me the strength unchangeably green to remain through

all seasons. And thou, little Ilse, art also a spring from a rock-source derived, and reflectest in thy clear stream heaven's own light, pure and untroubled, just as its rays shine down on thee. If the true life is in thee, that inner strength which the Lord gives, then wilt thou be able to overcome the winter. Now trust in God, little Ilse, and move about, and do not grow tired.'

'You dear fir-tree,' said little Ilse, 'I will be strong and trustful as you are; the Winter shall not harm me either.' And with a violent wrench she tore herself from the icy arms in which he had clutched her, she struggled with the rough hands which wished to hold her dress tightly wedged between the rocks, and sprang in wild haste into the valley below, breaking asunder all the fetters and chains that would have bound her. With such a wild young thing the old Winter could not keep pace, and he sat grumbling in the snow, and was obliged to confess his weakness, and the impossibility of imprisoning the swift Ilse.

The next day, as the little Princess sprang

happily along in her victorious joy, driving before her the icicles which she had broken from the rocks, the Moss by the wayside called out to her, 'Ah, Ilse, dear Ilse, help us! the snow presses so heavily on our weak, little heads, we can no longer stand upright on our feeble stems: help us, dear Ilse; the winter makes us miserable!' And Princess Ilse bent compassionately down to them, lifted carefully a little of the heavy snow-covering from off them, put her sweet little face underneath it, and whispered to the mosses the wise lesson which she had learnt from the fir-tree: 'As you are established on the rocks, little Moss, and as the good God allows you to remain green under the cold snow, so forget not that a divine life is in you, and strive to be strong and have courage, and grow under your white winter covering; the dear God will help you also, if you call to Him.' And the Moss learnt also to exert itself, and became so warm with its work, that after a time it cried out, 'Ilse, Ilse, it is giving! We are already standing upright and beginning to grow; the snow is giving where we

have pushed it away with our green little hands!'

Thus the small Ilse taught her playfellows, the moss and the grasses, to exert their strength, and bid defiance to Winter's might. She sprinkled the small grasses with fresh, life-giving water, and they grew and strove to meet the spring with the first greeting, when it came at last into the valley, and stripped the snow-covering from the ground, and sent Winter back to the Brocken, where the warm sun did not allow him to stay long.

The fir-tree had also thrown off its soft covering, and decked itself with bright green life on all the points of its dark boughs, in order to grace the spring *fête;* the oak and the beech also put their green dresses on again, and little Ilse lived a merry happy life in the quiet, lordly forest for many, many hundred years. The Winter returned again each year, and played the same cruel game with trees and plants, and placed on little Ilse his glittering fetters. But the restless, powerful child did not long allow herself to be caught; nimble and agile as a

squirrel she always escaped from his rough, icy hands.* The trees also every year became green again, standing every spring fresher and more beautiful, as if the hard struggle with winter had given them new strength and life. So also with little Ilse. She always appeared most brilliant and most sparkling when the snow melted in the mountains, and she, in renewed pride, ran bubbling and shining through the forest. The snow is sweet life's milk for small springs, the more eagerly they drink of it the stronger they become.

The green forest was proud of its lovely adopted child, the little Ilse; and, as she now never gave a thought to herself, but only cared for her dear trees and plants, and how she could do any act of love for them, and had quite and entirely forgotten that she was a Princess, so much the more all the others thought of it. The trees and the flowers, the rocks, the slender grasses and mosses, held her highly honoured and respected, in their quiet, cordial manner.

* The Ilse is never frozen.

Where the Princess ran through the valley the green things and flowers thronged round her feet, kissing the hem of her dress or her waving veil; and the tall, slender grasses stood whispering on the bank, and waved a greeting with their delicate feather hats. The pensive blue-bells, the loveliest of all the flower-children in the forest, above all, loved little Ilse, and wished to be nearer to her; they came close up to her, bowed themselves on her forehead, and gazed on her with earnest, thoughtful eyes. Yes, they even stepped on the wet, polished rocks which Princess Ilse held embraced in her arms; and she kissed the pretty blossoms tenderly, and laid them on a soft carpet of moss, so that their small, threadlike feet could take firm hold on the slippery ground. The blue-bells lived in friendly acquaintance with the grasses and ferns, and the summer passed like a happy fairy life on the moist rocks of the small enchanted island Princess Ilse held in her arms. The ferns, too, had climbed up wherever a place remained for them on the damp stones, and they fanned their splendid green leaves to cool their small Ilse,

and joked with the sunbeams, and would not allow them to kiss their beloved Ilse. However, the sunbeams also loved the small stream, and, as often as the grey clouds over the mountain allowed them, they came and played with her under the trees.

The grey clouds had been appointed from the oldest times as guardians of the sunbeams, and as they were so thick and unwieldy as hardly to be able to move, the Storm-wind sometimes came suddenly amongst them, and stirring them up with his broom, made them run. Then they could not endure to see the joyful dancing and sparkling of their bright light-footed nurslings, with little Ilse in the green forest below. So for days they often sat, like a wall, on the mountain, and would not allow the smallest sunbeam to creep through, even though it made itself ever so thin. At the same time the rain splashed into the valley, and saw, with great inward satisfaction, poor little Ilse flowing sadly and lonely along. But the sunbeams made such a fuss behind their cross, grim guardians, and became quite wild with im-

patience. They pushed through each other behind the backs of the old ladies, mocked and made faces at the grey clouds, and made it so hot for them with their sharp remarks, that the taunted guardians could not remain any longer on their chosen height, and quietly dispersed. Then, again, the road was free, and the sunbeams hurried down into the forest, swung in the rain-drops, which still hung on the trees, and chased each other often for the whole day with little Ilse. They were also once present when a white strawberry-blossom, whose very numerous family is scattered all over the valleys of the Hartz, stealthily had crept near, and gazed at its little round face and its white dress reflected in the shining veil of the Princess.

However, Ilse saw it, and shook her little finger at it,—'You naughty Strawberry-blossom! you are vain of that golden-yellow little bud on your forehead, and like to look in here as if into a looking-glass to admire yourself.' The startled strawberry-blossom dropped its white petals, and quickly drew under its green leaves. But the sunbeams sprang laughingly after it, and looked

for it under its broad leaves, and the poor little flower was sadly ashamed that it had been caught; and as often as a sunbeam lightened on it it blushed deeper and deeper, till, at last, it stood covered with deep crimson all over, hanging its little head ashamed behind its green leaf-shade. Even nowadays she has not been able to overcome the shame of having been discovered in her vain little ways, and still blushes crimson before the sunbeams, and droops her lovely head. The good full moon, little Ilse's old friend—it often also came to visit her—did not shun the difficult way over the mountain; but shone over the Ilsenstein, the most beautiful rock in the whole mountain, which the men of the valley had so named in honour of the Princess; and the moon stood over it and shone kindly down, and saw its favourite rolling on in the shadow of the mountain, and playing a pretty game with the silver little stars which she threw down to it.

Men had already also, for a long time, dwelt in the valley where the little Ilse ran, and, at first, she had been very shy with them. The Fir-

tree had its share of trouble in educating and polishing Ilse, before he could persuade the child to be friendly with them, or become used to their society.

The first men who came into the forest were a few charcoal-burners, who built themselves a hut there, felled trees, erected their charcoal-kiln, and then set it alight. Little Ilse shed many, many bitter tears over her dear trees, which, felled by sharp axes, lay dead on the ground; and the grasses and flowers had complained and whimpered as the men trod a path through the wilderness, and crushed their little heads. All this smote little Ilse to the heart. The flames and the smoke which rose up out of the charcoal-kiln reminded her, too, of the dreadful night on the Brocken, and filled her with terror. The Fir-tree, however, told her that men were lords of the creation, whom God had created after His image, and that all the rest of the world was destined to serve them; that every tree also had only the years to last which the Lord had appointed it, and then it would be either felled by the hands of men, or

struck by the lightning of heaven, or destroyed by decay, which eats into the inner life. She ought not to be afraid of fire; there was an excellent strength for good in it, which marked usefulness on the earth, if it were wisely used. Some day little Ilse would find that out, and would become on better terms with the fire in the future, and would give her hand to it, and work willingly with it in good fellowship.

Princess Ilse did not long for the time when she should have to come nearer to the fire and work together with it; but she had great respect for the intellect of the Fir-tree, and put full confidence in his words.

After some time there came many men together into the valley with axes and spades, and brought with them oxen and goats, which they allowed to graze in the green pastures in the valley. At a short distance below the Ilsenstein, where the valley widened, they stepped straight up to little Ilse, felled many trees near her, cut them into planks and beams, and dug out by her side a large saloon for the little Princess, protected its walls with stones and pieces

of turf, and left a great outlet towards the valley, which was well guarded with wood. With the planks and beams they had, in the mean time, built houses, in which they had taken up their abode with their wives and children; and when all was ready, they came to the Princess Ilse and begged her to descend into the large saloon, and make herself comfortable in it. The little Ilse thanked them, but preferred jumping past it. The men, however, stopped her way with stones and earth, and tore down a large piece of rock, which had protected the road of little Ilse. As she was in full run she could not stop, and precipitated herself through the opening with her full strength and fell into the saloon, which the men called a pond, and spread herself over its whole surface, and beat angrily with foaming little waves against its walls. It took some time ere she calmed herself in this strange prison. At last she became gentle, collected her little waves and her thoughts, and looked up inquiringly to the Fir-tree, which had remained unmolested near the gable-end of the houses. The Fir-tree smiled sorrowfully and said, 'Now

comes Cultivation, little Ilse; then will liberty and peace be sadly restricted in our beautiful forest.'

'God help us!' sighed little Ilse; 'that must certainly be the work of a demon! Those who can wantonly fell so many beautiful trees of a good God's creating, strip them of their bark, and afterwards hack them in pieces, they cannot have any good in their souls!'

'Poor child!' answered smilingly the Fir-tree; 'what will you say when you make acquaintance with the grandchild of Cultivation, Industry, who is a treasure-seeker, and digs in the ground in search of gold, and would not even spare the last trees if they stood in its way? It roots up forests and cultivates beetroot, and it erects large stone houses, with tiresome, heaven-high manufactory chimneys. Where you once see it, there is an end of all poetry.'

Little Ilse clasped her small hands, and looked up so full of anxiety, that the Fir-tree said again,—

'Be at rest, child! It will be a long, long time before Industry can come near us; she does

not come easily into the mountains, the flat lands suit her better; and we will implore Heaven to protect our quiet valley from her. Cultivation is, however, a faithful servant of the Lord's, brings blessing and wealth, and God's Word with it, where it peacefully takes up its abode. Do you not hear the little bell sounding morning and evening from the valley? The Emperor has presented the Castle down there, at the mountain gorge, to a venerable bishop, and he has allowed pious monks to come there and make a cloister; and the people who have come and settled here are in their service.'

Little Ilse understood all this, and gained thereby a little more confidence in men. She pressed herself against the outlet, and peeped out in drops through the wooden door, on to the house below. There she saw right under her a newly-constructed, powerful mill-wheel, and the miller's curly-headed boy stood on the path, and called laughingly up, 'Yes, look down, Princess; the doors will soon be opened, and then the dance will begin, and you shall swing merrily round the wheel.'

'Shall I then be broken on the wheel?' thought little Ilse, and glanced with a beating heart at the gigantic wheel, which commenced creaking and cracking in all its spokes, and whispered to her: 'Do you not know us, little Ilse? We are made of the wood of your beloved trees; do you not recognise us? You have nothing to fear, we will do you no harm.' And now the miller stepped out, and set about drawing up the sluice-gate, and cried out joyously, 'Now come down, little Ilse, you have been quiet in the pond long enough; come and stir yourself, and help us work.' Then the little Princess did not appear any longer reserved, but quickly ran on to the wheel below, gathered her little clothes together, and stepped with her delicate feet, dexterously and nimbly, first on one spoke and then on the other; and as the wheel began to revolve under her light tread, she jumped daringly still further, from step to step,—let her veil flutter in the wind, pressed a foam-cap on her head, and at last shot forth rushing and foaming along the mill-dam. The wheel turned with powerful swings, while the mill beat time

to it, and bright silvery strings of beads, which Princess Ilse had tossed off from her wet curls, dropped down from the spokes of the wheel.

The little Ilse had now entered heartily into the service of men, and had become a necessity for the existence and success of the valley and its inhabitants. She worked with the men in the mill and the iron foundry. In the latter place she made the once-dreaded acquaintance of the fire, and soon found that the disinclination was mutual: that the fire had as great a respect for her as she for him; and therefore they did not approach each other more than was necessary to promote the works, and separated again as soon as possible, agreeing that it was better to like each other at a distance. To the wives and daughters of the workmen the Princess Ilse stepped in shining pails to their dwellings, and helped them in their household work; in the kitchen, in washing, and scrubbing. She washed and bathed the children, watered the flowers and vegetables in the gardens, did not shrink from any service, however humble, and never felt false shame, for she knew she lost nothing of her

hereditary royalty by her humble work of love among the children of men.

Centuries had passed since little Ilse had first set her foot on the mill-wheel. When the doctrines of Luther spread in the valley, the monks had quitted the old abbey on the mountain, and a noble Count's family had taken up their abode there, and had for a long, long time flourished and governed in the Castle of Ilsenberg; and the little Ilse served them and their retainers, as she had formerly served the monks and their tithe-payers. When the Castle began to fall in ruins, and the Counts of Stolberg removed to another stronger residence, they took care that Princess Ilse and her beloved valley should not suffer through the change. They encouraged more industrious men to settle in the neighbourhood of Ilse, and to work in company with her, to bring to daylight the costly vein of the mountains—the strong iron,—and to harden and shape it properly, so that it might be fit for purposes of human industry.

Then one could see little Ilse working diligently from early till late, without being

tired or disliking the hard work. If one had met her in the valley, as she issued brightly in sparkling clearness from the forest, one would immediately have recognised in her a Princess of high birth, the daughter of light, and have done homage to her from the depths of the heart. The little Ilse, however, had not yet become a saint, and when a storm now and then broke over, which stirred up the mud in her stream, and brought to the surface all hidden faults and sins, from which no earthly creature, however exalted, is free, then was little Ilse deeply concerned how dark and stained her little waves appeared. She, however, let the storm teach her—as the storms of life ought to teach every one—a useful lesson, self-knowledge and refining; and when all impurity had cleared and passed away, then she flowed on more powerfully and magnificently than ever, and reflected the light of heaven in renewed strength and clearness.

Ilse had yet a deep sorrow to endure, when in the progress of cultivation, in later times, a broad highroad crept up the valley on number-

less cart-wheels, destroyed the green forest ground with spades and pick-axes, felled many lordly trees to the ground, and with sharp weapons fought the way which it only could gain by force.

'That I cannot stand! that I cannot bear!' cried little Ilse, in high mutiny. 'Shall that tiresome person with the French name,* year by year creep along at my side, with its slow snail-pace, and even, most likely, presume to play the governess and tutor me!—and call out peevishly, "Not so fast, Ilse! do not come too near the flowers!—do not jump so, Ilse! Just look how steadily I walk along?" The honest old forest road is quite a different sort of companion. How pleasantly he winds round amongst the rocks, and nods invitingly from the green shadows of the oak; and in fierce anger the little Princess foamed and splashed against the rocks which supported the highroad, and tried to undermine them so that the detested French-woman might have a fall.

* In Germany, the highroad is always called by the French name, *chaussée.*

'Ilse! Ilse!' warned the Fir-tree from the rocks above, 'what is the use of such foolish child's tricks? Can you not yet understand that we must bear everything which tends for the use and benefit of man? If we trees put up with the new highroad, surely you can more easily bear with it. We certainly do not rejoice when we see it wandering up the valley in its dusty-coloured trailing gown. I am quite ashamed of you, Ilse; and look how the witches across there, on the slope of the mountain, are laughing at you!'

The revelry which the demon brood had held on the Brockenberg had ceased since pious Christian people had taken up their abode there; and the dispersed demons and witches wandered in various disguises through the land, and often clothed themselves in the loveliest and most bewitching forms, in order to lead poor souls astray, and gain them over to their dark realm. A number of young witches, who still owed little Ilse a grudge, because she had eclipsed them all in dignity and grace on the Brockenberg, came every summer into the valley in order to spy

upon little Ilse, and if they could not play her any other trick, at least estrange her friends from her. In the dress of splendid red fox-gloves stood the witches, in coquettish groups, on the open slopes of the mountain in the bright sunshine, and they nodded to the ferns and cried to the benevolent blue-bells, in order to make them quarrel, that blue-bells and fox-gloves were near relations. The blue-bells saw, however, the deadly poison drop at the bottom of the shining flower calyx, and lightly shook their little heads, went down to Ilse, and begged the ferns to stand before them and spread out their green fans, so that they need not see the wicked rabble any longer.

Princess Ilse looked shyly up and murmured a quiet prayer as she passed them by. The faithful blue-bells and ferns she praised and caressed; and when she found that the wet stones in her way looked up at the witches with much too brightly gleaming faces, she threw her silver veil unexpectedly over them, and blinded them with bright rays of sunlight which she caught and spattered teasingly in their faces.

As to the highway, however, though Princess Ilse could not prevent its going through the valley, yet she determined to see as little of it as possible. She tried, in snakelike curves through the deepest shadows in the forest, to escape its sight, but when she sprang in frantic haste over the rocks, and imagined that she had altogether escaped from her dusty companion, she ran suddenly right against her! and the high-road threw a bridge over her, and the Princess Ilse had to glide under and bend herself to the yoke, and hide her rage, until she could again find her liberty beyond.

But the anger of little Ilse did not last long. Lower down in the valley she runs peacefully alongside of the highway, and kisses humbly the feet of the Ilse-rock, on whose summit the holy cross stands erected; for as she never died, she lives still to the present day, and still daily follows her modest occupation in the mills and iron-works in the valley. On Sundays, when the mills are stopped, and the industrious inhabitants of the Ilse valley, in their best clothes, walk up the castle-hill to pray in the little old church up

there, and to hear the word of God which is preached there so openly and clearly, with strength and piety, the silver voice of little Ilse sounds softly, rippling and mixing with the clang of bells and the pealing of the organ which sweeps from the walls of the old castle far over the valley.

For many hundred years has little Ilse streamed through the valley, bringing blessings with her, and yet has lost nothing of her original freshness and loveliness. Had she not drunk from the source of eternal youth, which in steady, useful work, in purity and serenity, cleanses itself from every stain and lets the clear light of heaven stream through it, rising from a rock, from which she had gained strength, flowing from a rock which God had created—and which is attainable to every one who looks for it in the right place? Thus now is proved to the world, by the example of Princess Ilse, what can be made of a foolish erring child when once haughtiness is overcome; and upon men who, from desert wastes or from the dreary heights of everyday life, come into the valley thirsting for sum-

mer, she breathes the feelings of childhood, and makes them feel again like harmless, trusting children, so long as they remain in her scented forest shade, where the verdure grows greener and more fragrant, where the air is fresher and more full of life, than in any other spot in the world.

Little Ilse has learned not to fear the demon and his witches, where she glides secure in the shadow of the Ilsenstein. She even ventures to represent Princess 'Boiling-water,' and when the summer visitors of the valley boil their coffee at the mossy bank under the Ilsenstein, she steps up to them without any shyness and lets them put her in the swinging little kettle, allows the lady who makes the coffee all the honour of its excellence, claims no merit and no praise for herself, and only demands, as her own reward, that those who have had the great pleasure of drinking coffee made from the water of the stream should leave a tribute of sugar and bread for the little field-mouse. This little creature lives in the stone rifts of the moss bank, and descends in straight lineage from that field-mouse which dug

the little path from the Brocken through which, in ancient remote ages, the Princess Ilse escaped into the valley. It is not every picnic party which has the honour of seeing the pointed small head and the bright eyes of the pretty little animal peeping out from its mossy pillow, for the tiny mouse is rather particular in its society, and is as shy as most of its race. But whoever sees it is bound, under the penalty of Princess Ilse's heavy displeasure, to feed it with sugar and bread, or any other dainty crumbs of things which men eat with their coffee; and little mice love to nibble in the rifts of the rocks.

This fairy tale has now nothing further to relate. It has nestled deeply in the green forest valley, and feels no pleasure in following little Ilse into the flat plains, where she meets Ecker and Ocker, and further on Aller also, who conduct her to old Weser. But the aged Weser carries Aller and Ocker, and Ecker and Ilse, and all the streams and rivulets which run to her, out into the open sea.

FORGET ME NOT.

BY a fresh meadow spring, on a soft cushion made by the mossy covering of a stone, sat two small Elves, and watched the rippling and glancing of the water at their feet. One was a queer little man, somewhat broad-shouldered, with a short neck and shrivelled figure. The thin legs, which he anxiously drew up as if he feared the water that wantonly sprang towards him, gave him a strange aspect. His dress was brown, and extremely plain. On his head he wore a grey leather cap, which hung in an odd way over his pale, ugly, yet good-humoured face.

The other Elf was a slender, delicate female figure. Her fair hair hung in curls over her

shoulders; her lovely, but roguish face, was reflected in the glancing water, in which she splashed with her bare feet, maliciously squirting water-drops in the face of her neighbour when he was not looking.

She wore a dress made of flower-leaves, and had pressed an auricular blossom over her golden tresses for a hat. 'So! Heinzelmann,' said the petulant beauty, 'you are still afraid of the water?'

'I have shoes on,' answered he. Now this was true, but it was not exactly the real cause of his shyness of water. 'But,' continued he, wishing to change the conversation, 'don't call me Heinzelmann; my well-known family name sounds so cold. Call me rather "Greycap," as mortals call me when they are fond of me.'

'Very good,' replied the other Elf; 'and you shall call me "Lilli." Now we are real friends.' And such they truly were, though their characters and appearance were so different. Their friendship had begun in a mere watering-place acquaintance, and out of this had grown a friendship that lasted when the bathing season was over

and they had parted, and though they had not seen each other, and had not written for some time, perhaps for this very reason they had thought more of each other.

On this evening they had met again by the meadow spring, as for several years they had been in the habit of doing. Greycap, in order that he might regularly and strictly begin the course of baths which would refresh him after the hard work and dust in which the rest of his year was spent. Lilli for pleasure, to see the company that assembled by the spring, and to greet the flowers which grew here so luxuriantly, although Greycap assured her she would find the same species and genera growing quite as beautifully in a thousand other places. Greycap had travelled here wearily on foot. Lilli had ordered her four-in-hand of butterflies or grasshoppers (I do not exactly remember which were most the fashion that season), and had lightly flown through the air. Greycap bathed every morning and drank the prescribed number of dewdrops, which he carefully brushed from flowers of the most healing properties. Lilli paid visits, chattered, gos-

siped, and studied whether some other elf had not invented some other fantastic manner of arranging flower-leaves into dresses. In the evenings, however, the friends met and related to each other the small events of the day—their experiences of the past year—and their dreams of the future. This evening we will play the spy and listen.

'You look pale, Greycap,' said the Elf after a pause, and her roguish little face wore for a moment an expression of sympathy; 'you have regularly overworked yourself in the thick, dusty air of your study.'

'Truly there was much to do,' answered the little fellow; 'there was a deluge of small books and printed bills, and among the stream of political pamphlets which threatened to inundate us, came here and there, as a variety, poetical pictures, or pompous and learned thick folios. I am now Heinzelmann* to a publisher, and have

* The Heinzelmann is a little spirit appointed to watch over and arrange things in printing-offices. They work all night, and can be very mischievous and ill-natured.

had this year much to do. Many letters and papers were brought to daylight which had long lain forgotten in their hiding-places, and from them I breathed so much dust into my lungs, that this season my bathing holiday was more than ever needed.'

Lilli laughed loud and long. 'Now, then, I must really pity you! What interest can you have in the books, pamphlets, letters—yes, even in the mortals themselves?'

'That you don't understand, my beautiful friend. Everyone must work in the place in which Providence has appointed him. The bees must build their cells, the ants must drag together the materials for their hills, and if thoughtless or cruel mortals disturb them they must begin afresh. I must work and help like them, and that makes my happiness. Do you never work?'

'No! I dance in the moonlight, I chatter with the flowers, I watch the glowworms, I live and enjoy myself!'

'You are like a butterfly, that is your nature; and to *enjoy*, that is your work. Look, also,

among mortals, with so many of whom I have intercourse, there are many different natures. Some are as hardworking as I am. Some enjoy themselves as you do; live in nature, listen to and learn from her. These are the poetical spirits; their work is idleness, and idleness is their work. Men call them dreamers and laugh at them, because they live in a world of their own creation, and which no one else understands. If they succeed sometimes (by words, or sounds, or colours) in opening to others a glimpse of this world, they are called poets or artists; and yet by this success they have not become better, nor their work, as work, more valuable. Your destiny is to float in the poetry of nature, and to repeat in your life and being the holy songs of the creation. Be content with your lot, but do not also undervalue mine.'

Did the Elf understand him?—whether or not, she felt herself flattered.

'Very likely,' said she; 'that you are obliged to work, I can believe: but you, poor creature —now between ourselves—is it not very hard, very wearisome?'

'Not in the least,' exclaimed Greycap, and drew himself proudly up. 'You cannot imagine the satisfaction it is. There lie the black letters, each arranged in order in its little dwelling. My business is to watch over them, that they do not spring out among each other. At night, when I sit by the box, I often hear a humming among them,—there is disorder somewhere,—or a poor little letter softly complains that he has fallen into a company of strangers. Sometimes a poor little *a* is laughed at and mocked because it has got amongst the capital A.'s; at other times a vowel is exposed to the jeers of all the consonants, for each kind flatters itself that it is the superior. All this I have to bring into order; and in the morning, when the compositor arrives, he little imagines the hard work I have had all night! The compositor snatches here and there in the box, and to look at him one would imagine he was only creating the most direful confusion. But he arranges them all according to thoughts which other men have written for him; and when the letters are printed and stand on paper, they often express so much

that is beautiful and good, that one truly has a great delight in them. I read all the proof-sheets, that is my recreation.'

'Delightful recreation!' cried Lilli, mockingly.

The Heinzelmann became graver, cleared his throat, as if he had formed a grand resolution, and said, 'We are friends, Lilli, and that gives me the privilege of being candid with you. You are clever; you have great natural talent——'

'That I can perfectly believe.'

'Do not interrupt me, Lilli; but you want cultivation, and you despise literature and learning, only because you don't understand them. That is not right.'

'Greycap!' exclaimed Lilli, and turned offended away; 'you are extremely rude!'

'I may be,' said the little fellow, rubbing his hands in embarrassment: 'you know well, however, that it is not unkindly meant. You are so talented! What might you not become if you would only read? And in winter you have such leisure for it.'

'In winter,' replied the Elf, still rather irritated, 'in winter I have just the least time.

Then I visit my beloved flowers in the lap of the earth, where they sleep in their narrow, hard, seed-beds. I sit by them, and tell them of the sweet spring's breath and the joys of summer, so that when the time comes they may gladly awake, and quickly arise to a new perfume and a life of colour. Then also in winter I watch over the spirits of the faded flowers which hover around us, and teach them how they must again bud, blossom, and shine.'

'The flower-spirits?' asked Greycap, unbelievingly.

'Don't you know anything about them? Oh, so much for the book-worms!' cried Lilli. 'Without them how would the flowers know what they had to do when they enter the world for the first time?'

'Nay, that you must teach me,' said the Heinzelmann, whose interest was aroused. 'Formerly one read much in books of the souls of the departed, but in the present time they are seldom mentioned. Tell me about them!'

'When the flowers die,' proceeded Lilli, 'their spirits are clothed with their last fragrance

(for the perfume is properly the soul of the flower, as thought is the soul of man), which rises from the dead calyx. Long do they hover round the deserted body, then slowly fly away. If you think of it, you may often observe it; for constantly the perfume of blossoms that have bloomed far away, even of plants that we have never known, floats through the air. The dead flower fades; the seed grows till it, too, sinks and falls into the earth. For this, like faithful nurses, the flower-spirits watch and gather round the cradle of their future sister; and they sing loving cradle-songs, and plant in the heart of the slumbering seed all that they have experienced in the brief course of their lives, and what they have learnt in their intercourse with nature and with men. So the future life grows and struggles in the bosom of the dumb earth; so the flower learns to understand something of men, whether he will love or slight her, what meaning he will attach to her colour and form, and with this knowledge she springs up into daylight.'

'You poetise,' said Greycap.

'Will you have proof that what I say is true?' asked Lilli; and without waiting for his answer, she bent herself backwards and plucked a forget-me-not from the hedge of flowers that guarded and sheltered her seat. 'See this flower—you know the name and meaning given it by mortals?—it is the forget-me-not.'

'"Myosotis pratensis," or Mouse-ear,' corrected Greycap.

'What do I care for your learned names?' continued Lilli; 'we and the hearts of men have given it the name of Forget-me-not. It is the flower dedicated to friendship and love. They know as much as that when they grow on their green stalks; but they are also ignorant, and change their purposes and feelings. The buds at first clothe themselves in red, the colour of love, and think that in this their beauty will consist. They recollect, however, in time what the flower-spirits have sung to them, and colour themselves blue down to the deep yellow calyx, around which the leaflets clusteringly cling, like a prayer for faithfulness, or like a last clasping

adieu in a parting hour. How could they do this if they did not know their name?'

Greycap, who had studied the whole botanical literature of the world, in spite of all his learning did not know how to answer this.

'And you reproach me that I do not read?' said Lilli: 'you think, perhaps, that the only books are those printed from your black letters? You poor deluded Greycap! to you the dull printing-room appears greater than the whole world of nature. Creation has thousands and thousands of better writings. You can't read them; however, I can. See the little leaves of this forget-me-not! see the soft blue velvet! And now, as I hold it against the light, look how the delicate veins cross and separate and again wind together. Do you imagine that they grow without plan or meaning? Do you imagine that Nature in her writings proceeds with less purpose than the hand of your compositor, who grasps in the box the letters which you keep in order? Each feature has meaning; each fibre a purpose; each breath-thought on the petals is something written in plain letters.

I can read it, and if you were a poet instead of a printer you could read it also.'

Greycap hesitated between curiosity and the conviction that what the Elf said was not true. He would not ask her to read to him, for that would be admitting that he believed her, and yet he was most anxious to know what she learnt from the leaves. He imagined it might be some sort of classification of flowers, or perhaps it was a catalogue which each carried with it. He nodded knowingly, as if he already knew the answer, and observed rather than asked, 'But the same is written on all leaves.'

'No, on none,' said Lilli; 'the rich stores of nature never repeat themselves; and because,' added she ironically, 'you have so much understanding, and such a love of cultivation, I will explain the reason to you. I have already told you that the flower-spirits relate their histories to the seeds, and as the flowers grow they write a story on each leaf, and to those who know how to read it each flower is a book with many pages. These I read in my leisure hours, and you reproach me that I never try to improve

myself by reading. How could I know so much of mortals, with whom I have no intercourse, if the flowers had not told me of them?'

'Oh, read to me what is written on your forget-me-not!' cried Greycap.

'Very simple things: what else can happen to a forget-me-not?' said Lilli.

'Oh, pray tell me what is written on the five petals that you hold in your hand! Pray, pray, my clever, beautiful friend!'

Lilli gazed long and silently at the flower, and the Heinzelmann earnestly hoped in his secret mind that she would not be able to decipher anything on it.

'It is not like your books, where one begins at the top of the page,' said Lilli; 'here one must first find the thread of the story, and then the rest follows.'

'Something like the way in which fortune-tellers read men's fate to them from their hands?' asked Greycap.

'Almost,' answered she; 'only my art is surer. Listen then! On this first leaf stands written the story of a forget-me-not spirit.

'On the meadow where I bloomed, there played and laughed two children—a girl with fair waving ringlets, and a boy with dark-brown hair but a few years older. They were catching butterflies—at least, the girl was—for the boy looked more at her than at the gay coloured insects. They were neighbours' children. "Oh, dear!" cried the girl, "it is a swamp here; and beyond is a deep ditch, and a most beautiful peacock's-eye butterfly has just flown over, and I can't get it." She stood disconsolately, as if a great joy had escaped her. "Stand still!" said the boy; "I'll carry you over the ditch." "No, no, you'll drop me!" cried she. But the beautiful peacock's eye fluttered close along the other side, and she could almost reach it with her net. The boy turned away offended, but the fair girl, still watching her butterfly, beckoned him back. "Be quick," said she; "there it is again." The boy took her in his arms, and stepped down into the ditch; there he stood still with his lovely burden. "What will you give me for this service?" "Nothing; but make haste—I am too heavy for you." "Nothing? Then I will stay

here." "You rude boy! and you are sinking every moment deeper in the mud! What do you want?" "A kiss!" "How stupid!" said she, looking down, and turning her head away. "Oh, those beautiful forget-me-nots!" exclaimed she, forgetting her danger and the demanded kiss. "You must pick me some," and she quickly swung herself from his arms on to the other bank. The boy, however, remained standing in the ditch. "The forget-me-nots?" asked he. "Oh, yes; the forget-me-nots." He bent to pick them, and she clapped her hands joyfully. "What will you do with the flowers?" "I will arrange them in a saucer full of water, lay a stone on their stalks, and place them in my mother's room; then they will grow higher, and come out beautifully." For a short time they sat together on the bank. The girl arranged the flowers he had picked for her into a neat heap in her apron. The boy sat by, quite happy watching her, and had already forgotten the kiss she had refused him. "Give me one flower?" begged he. "No; not one. Why did you try just now to force me to kiss you?" She gathered the corners of her

apron together and ran home. The boy frowned, and clenched his fist as he looked after her; then he went his way as if it mattered nothing to him. To us little forget-me-nots it happened just as she said: a few days later the frivolous girl had already forgotten the butterfly, the denied kiss, and the refused flower. We, however, had grown high up, had opened all our buds, and bent our heads over the stone which separated us, to chatter together, and ask after the boy, whom we had not seen for so long. One day he came in. He had a message to the mother of the fair girl, and, as he delivered it, his eyes fell on the saucer of forget-me-nots. He stepped towards it, picked the stalk on which I grew, and stuck it in his button-hole. "What are you doing?" asked the lady, but he blushed, and held his cap over the flower. Soon I faded between the leaves of his Latin grammar. There I remained long, till it was winter, and everything covered with snow. One day the boys played at snow-ball before the house. The books were hurriedly placed on a wood-stack, and I fell out, and was carried with some wood and put into the stove of the class-

room, just as the boy was reproved because he kept turning over the leaves of his grammar during the lesson, and would not say what he was looking for. I have never learnt what he sought, or why he blushed as he took me from the saucer.'

'That is the story of the first leaf,' said Lilli, as she picked it off, and let it float down the stream. 'There are four more leaves on the calyx.'

The Heinzelmann did not know exactly what to say to the story, as, during the whole time, he had sat in somewhat painful impatience, half waiting to find the point, half reflecting on what criticism he could use that might as little as possible offend his friend.

'Very pretty; but you must also sometimes read my books; they contain much more. In them one learns what arises later from it all, what strange adventures come between them, till at last the children become man and wife. I have all along been expecting to hear, that.'

'I know as little about that as my forget-me-

not,' said the Elf; 'it is no book, it is only a leaf, and my poor forget-me-not spirit could relate no more than just what fate had allowed her to observe. Shall I read further?'

'They will be just the same to the end,' said Greycap; 'such events can happen to all forget-me-nots, but not much more.'

'Let us see!' She held the second leaf to the light, studied it awhile, then read evenly and unbrokenly what another spirit had related.

'I sprang up and blossomed on the banks of a bright river. I could not see as far as the middle of the stream, for I and my sisters grew in a little meadow which was always damp from the water-drops that the merry rolling waves threw on the shore, and which sank through sand and gravel to our dwelling-place. Although on one side, I could not see the river, but only hear it rippling (perhaps because I was still short, having only a few hours before unfolded my blossoms), yet, on the other side, I saw the high mountain-wall of the valley, on whose cliffs three ruined castles were enthroned, over which the first evening glow that I had seen spread a wonderful beauty.

Already the sun was sinking, and I was waiting for the peaceful calm of evening, when I heard a confused tumult of men's voices, the sound of horses' feet, and the splashing of oars in the river. I turned away from the castles on which my flower-gaze had been intently fixed, and felt that I grew with curiosity. I pushed my head between my sisters till I had a good view of what was passing on the shore. A long train of youthful figures on horseback, or in carriages, came rapidly in sight. First came three riders in high boots, close-fitting short coats, with swords by their sides. Their gay scarves fluttered over their breasts with the rapid motion—on their heads they wore small coloured caps. Then came several carriages, attended by more armed horsemen. Several four-in-hands followed, and the train was closed by various carriages, with a pair of horses each. At the shore a halt was called, and from each carriage young men got out, with students' caps over their waving hair. Horses and carriages, in a disorderly throng, turned round and went back the way they had come. On the shore lay a boat decorated

with garlands and oak-boughs, and from each mast floated a flag of the same colour as the scarves and caps. Music greeted the new comers. Most of them got into the boat, but some wandered with light steps along the shore. The rowers pushed off, and the music played one of the students' songs, in which the young voices joined. The oars in the tiny waves kept time, and I involuntarily turned my gaze back to the ruins, which, in the glory of the sunset, despite their gloomy grey hue, looked festively down on the joyous throng. Suddenly I was aroused from my dreamy observations. The students who walked along the shore had each plucked a bunch of flowers or green sprays to put in his cap. One cap still wanted this decoration, and, as the wearer passed by me, he stooped, and in one grasp seized me and many of my companions. A thick bunch of forget-me-nots now decorated his cap, and I loudly rejoiced that I should join and help to adorn this great student festival. All now had left the boat, and were scattered in large or small parties over the mountain and valley, or wan-

dered by the shore as fancy, inclination, or chance led. I waved over the brow of my wearer up on the ruins, which I had seen so longingly from a distance. Through ivy and brambles I was quickly borne to the highest summit of the old, tottering walls. I saw the wide, wide world beneath me, and glanced (to my shame I must confess it) almost with contempt on the little spot below, which had been my home. The students who accompanied us strolled further. My friend climbed to the top of the ruined tower—I felt giddy. A house-leek, against which I brushed in passing, whispered to me, "What dost thou want up here, flower of the valley?" I looked at him with a proud smile, but before I could answer we were at the top. My friend stepped up on the wall, threw his arms round the trunk of a tree whose tough roots had pierced the hard stones, and gazed down on the widely-extended view spread out before us. He had become warm with climbing, took off the cap which I decorated, and laid it on a great stone by his side. The first excitement was over, and now I waved in uncertain,

melancholy thought, and was in so poetical a mood, that I felt compelled to compose a poem whose gloomy tone would reflect my desolate ruined surroundings. My student must have felt the same, for he pulled out his pocket-book and wrote some verses in pencil. I wished very much to read what he had written, for I felt convinced that he had borrowed my poem from me, of which, although I felt so proud, not even a line was yet begun. But the cap (and I with it) was pushed on one side. Soon the setting sun shone dazzlingly on the paper. The student tried to avoid it, but had nowhere else to go. After a moment's reflection, he laid his cap by the pocket-book, so that the bouquet threw its shadow on the paper, and I could read it all. Nothing but a few verses, descriptive of pleasure in the beauty of the sunset, joy in the present. *That* was not a poem—not what I would have written. No tears for the past, not even longing for the future, found place in the complete fulness of peace and rest, and of deep joy, in the present. Truly, he who wrote them was a student. A student! Ah! there must lie the

answer. "What are you doing up there?" called out a voice from below. "Nothing," answered my student, who closed his pocket-book, pressed his cap on his forehead, and ran quickly down the tower, followed by the dull roll of many stones, which his rapid descent had dislodged from the ruined walls.

'The many scattered groups now drew towards the hotel by the river, where the whole joyous company assembled in a large saloon. A long dinner-table was spread, and at each end lay crossed two swords or rapiers, such as those used by students. The musicians were already ready in the orchestra. Opposite to them was a brilliant transparency, on which shone the arms of the company which enrolled in it this crowd of students.

'Saloon and table were adorned with flowers. Each guest laid aside his coat, and drew from his shoulder, over the breast, the tri-coloured ribbon of the society. Now a signal was given with the swords, and each took his place, and the meal began. All was merriment, over-flowing light-heartedness,—the spirits, the mirth,

the joy of youth! Glasses were filled and emptied. On this side and on that each one drank with the other. The music sounded the melody of a song. The clang of the swords on the table was heard. "Silence!" called the voice of the President. The conversation stopped, and all joined in the gay, festive music.

'This first song was dedicated to friendship; and I, the flower of friendship, rocked myself to the tune of the melody, and glanced with pride on the other flowers which decorated the caps—the table—the walls—as if this homage was paid to me. And when the song was ended, and all stood up, hands were pressed and glasses clinked. Then I felt a sensation of agreeable melancholy as if a tear had risen out of my deep calyx. I am but a sentimental little flower. So it went on till far into the night, ever noisier and more mirthful; but many confiding, earnest words were also whispered. My student linked his arm in another's, and stepped out on the balcony which opened into the saloon. Over us shone the starry heavens in their eternal silence; at our feet, the rushing river, behind which the

mountain wall rose dark in the night; behind us the clatter of glasses—the excited tumult of voices. Again rattled the swords thrown down on the table, and again the President's voice, "Silence!" sounded more commandingly through the room. The voices were hushed, the coats were again put on, and each returned to his place. To the festive confusion of the previous moment there followed a solemn silence. "The Fatherland" was given, and now began that wonderful melody. The first verses were sung like those of the preceding songs, only with more feeling. Then the presidents (of whom there were two, one at each end of the table,) stood up on their chairs and beat time with their swords to the music,—

> "See! glancing in the air,
> These swords, still pure and fair!
> I pierce my cap and swear."

'And with an oath they each laid a finger on their crossed swords, with which they had pierced their caps, and sung further,—

> "This solemn oath I take,
> For loyal friendship's sake."

'Then they handed the swords to their neighbours, who repeated the lines; and so one after the other the caps were strung on the blades till each head was bare and the swords were loaded. It went hard with us, poor flowers; and as my neighbour's cap pressed on that which carried me, I felt my stalk crack. The music changed. I pushed forward between the edge of the caps, and saw how the swords were passed back to the President, who now sang,—

> "So take them! Brave heads shall they cover,
> Over which bright swords flashingly hover.
> May success crown this brotherhood ever!"

'Then the caps were returned in order, till each head was again covered. The swords, as if in blessing, were waved over them, and then laid down. "*Exeat commercium initium fidelitatis!*" sounded, and the tumult, which through this solemn song had been restrained, again broke wildly forth. How fared it with us as the caps were waved? The poor forget-me-not bouquet to which I belonged fell scattered on the table, and he who had plucked us never even remarked it. But still, crushed and withered as we lay, we

did not remain utterly unnoticed. The neighbour of my friend glanced down on me, and as if seized by a sudden recollection picked me up. "A forget-me-not!" whispered he. "A forget-me-not!—just the same, as the one she refused me years ago. Now she is tall and beautiful—would she again refuse me one?—as if she had given it me!" said he, and laid me between the leaves of his song-book, just in the place where the words were,

> "Lovingly she followed him; she gave him her hand;
> She made him a home in that far-distant land."

'After that my spirit departed. When the student opens the book again, after long years, of what will that poor withered forget-me-not remind him? Of the maiden at home?—or of the merry student festival in the valley of the Neckar?'

The Heinzelmann had listened in silence, but whether out of interest, resignation, or gallantry, is not known.

'Yes; mortals keep strange festivals,' said he, 'especially if they are students.'

'Our forget-me-not appeared to have been quite captivated by it,' answered Lilli; 'the festival moved her to tears!'

'Ah! but over what will a forget-me-not not weep?' remarked Greycap.

'But it all seemed so solemn to her.'

'Poor forget-me-not!' continued he; 'and it was all such perfect folly—the carriages, the drinking, and above all the piercing the caps.'

'Maybe; but I am not responsible for my story,' said Lilli, and let the second leaf drop into the brook.

Greycap bent forward as if to stop it, but the stream had already carried it away.

'It is a pity,' said he, 'for I should like to have copied those lines which the students sang.'

'What for?' asked the Elf; 'upon thousands of leaves are songs much prettier than those.'

'I could perhaps have used them occasionally when I had a page to fill up,' said the Heinzelmann; 'they were good enough for that: one does not take actual merit into account. We have the poems tastefully and prettily bound, and decorate them with gold letters and vignettes.

Books at present supersede every other toy upon the tables of mortals; formerly they had other things. Now, one has pleasure in good bindings, one even turns over the leaves occasionally, but no one troubles himself much about the contents.'

'Comical creatures are mortals,' mocked Lilli; 'and that you call a taste for reading!'

The sun had set in the meantime; twilight lay upon the meadow; from the moist ground rose a fog, which reached to the spot where our pair sat. The wide damp veil stretched itself and undulated on the evening air. The Heinzelmann pulled his cap tighter over his face and ears; the Elf gathered some of the tufts of the white silky cotton grass which grew in the meadow and spread them on the bank. Then she prepared to read the third leaf of her flower.

'You will spoil your eyes,' said Greycap, and tried to take the flower out of her hand. Lilli laughed. She rose up from her place and called across the meadow in a clear voice, 'You fireflies! wake up! Light your lamps and shine!'

And the whole meadow began to glitter in

the dewy grass with sparks that became ever brighter and brighter. The little lights rose up in the grey fog, first slowly, but getting livelier, as whizzing and glittering they flew here and there!

'Here, to me!' commanded the Elf; 'and those which are very quiet, and shine very brightly, may listen to what I read.'

Then all the tiny lamps settled on the moss that covered the stone on which their friend sat, or hung on the flowers which shaded it, so that she sat in a bright light, which the stream reflected back when the flowers waved or the water rippled.

'How it shines!' joyfully exclaimed Greycap; 'like a ball-room!'

'And I will conduct you into a ball-room,' said Lilli, who had found the thread of her story on the third leaf. She read:—'I was not born in the free air of nature. A great broad hall with glass walls saw me spring up. It was pretty enough there, but I always missed sadly the fresh breezes of the meadows. We were a large assemblage of flowers from every land under heaven.

There bowed the proud palm; the wonderful insect flowers of the orchids waved and twined and shed perfume down from the roof; the coquettish camellia allowed her blossoms to adorn the shining walls; the pomegranate burnt with its fiery silent glow. Who could remember or recount half the home-sick complaints of the plants and flowers? I truly was not torn from my native country, but they had changed the season of the year to which I belonged; they had cheated me of the spring and summer of life. This the sunbeams told me. They used to visit us when the mats were taken from the windows and we could look out on a world full of ice and glittering snow. "But why imprison *us* also?" I used often to ask of a companion violet who grew near me. "Why *us*, who are so little prized in comparison with these noble, splendid, foreign plants?" We had not much time to reflect on this, for one day the gardener who had care of us appeared—cut the blossoms from every branch and carried us all away together. Delicate hands tied us up in small bouquets, and arranged us in a large crystal dish, and so,—

bound together, as fate had ordained, and well covered up from the winter's wind,—they carried us forth. Half-shivering from the icy breath which pierced my protecting cover, half longing after the free, fresh air, busy with my own feelings, I scarcely noticed the calm resignation with which a dark camellia near me bore the sharp winter blast; scarcely heard the low moaning of the orange-blossoms, who, sadly cowering together, hid themselves under their glossy leaves; nor how a more hardy heath vainly tried to comfort them. Suddenly a warm perfumed air streamed towards us. A brilliant beam of light burst upon the crystal dish in which we lay. The cover was withdrawn, and I gazed in wonder on the never-before-seen splendour of a ball-room! Light streamed from the glittering chandeliers—light shone from the walls. A gaily dressed, joyous crowd assembled. The orchestra poured forth its melody into the room, in which many couples whirled round, as if stricken suddenly by an electric shock.

'We must have arrived towards the close of the entertainment, for a spray of myrtle which

had fallen from the bouquet of a beauty, and had been carelessly flung into our dish, related and explained so many wonders that my mind was quite confused. A retired spot was allotted to us flowers, and no one seemed to think of us. We were placed on the ledge of a window, behind a fluttering curtain, but still so that I could see everything. At first, stunned and giddy with the splendour of the lights and the tones of the music which swelled through the saloon—the glitter and the jewels—the beauty of the figures —I slowly recovered myself enough to observe all, and the friendly myrtle-spray was ready to answer every question. What a strange, restless scene it was! How coldly and gravely the dancers approached the beauties! How formally they bowed, and how formally was the offered hand accepted! A few seconds later, and the pair rustled past us. The eyes sparkling, the bosom heaving, and the slender figure of the lovely one trembling in the arms that encircled her; but when arrived again at her place, the same calm bow—the same formal greeting—a perpetual lighting up and extinguishing! Now

came a longer pause. The instruments were tuned anew. In the ball-room was much bustle and preparation and placing of chairs together. Then the music began again. The dancers were conducted to their places. The chairs were occupied. The first couple began the dance. The lady was the loveliest of all present. The Queen of the *fête*—a tall, slender figure. Fair ringlets hung flowing down over her shoulders. The purple bells of a fuschia encircled the proudly-carried head. Her eyes—conscious and secure of conquest—shone more brilliantly than the diamonds which sparkled on her breast. The beautiful arm, loaded with heavy bracelets, rested lightly on the shoulder of her partner. The myrtle-sprig quickly noticed the object of my attention. "That is the daughter of the house, whose betrothal is celebrated to-day," it said: "her partner is the future bridegroom. I know it, for I fell out of the bouquet which she holds, and the bouquet and the jewels were presented to her by him just before the ball."

'"How happy she must be!" I sighed.

'Close to the window sat an elderly lady with

her daughter, who had apparently found no partner. She whispered to a gentleman who stood close by her chair, "He has been regularly caught by the mamma. However, that was not very difficult, for he is a perfect fool."—"The bride is my most intimate friend," continued the daughter, "and she confided to me, only a week ago, that she thought him wearisome to the last degree: but she is such a flirt and——." "It is a splendid match!" observed the gentleman. The dance led two young officers near me. "She is perfectly lovely!" said one. "But she has no heart," answered the other. Opposite to me, and leaning against a door, stood a young man in a plain evening dress. He did not dance, and spoke but little. Only his eyes followed unceasingly the brilliant being who was the theme of the evening, the object of all attention. I felt a deep compassion for him, without knowing why. Just as I had begun to think that we poor flowers were quite forgotten, the dish in which we lay was placed on a small round table in the centre of the room. One after another of the dancers stepped up to it, chose a bouquet and presented it to a

lady, and a turn in the dance was the reward for the gift. The dish was almost empty, and the bouquet in which I was had not been taken, when I saw the young man who had been watching the beautiful bride so earnestly at last leave his place. He came up to the table with a firm step. "A forget-me-not!" he murmured; seized the bouquet to which I belonged, and presented it to the daughter of the house. As he bent before her, he fixed his dark eyes on her face. She shrank before his gaze, and glancing down at the flowers which she had received, as if to conceal her agitation, said, "Oh, forget-me-nots! oh, don't you remember how we used to pick them as children?" "And *later*," said he. "But hush! no recollections of the past to-day!" He offered his arm and they danced round the room. A few minutes later, I looked up, but he had not returned to his place—he had disappeared. The ball was at an end, the company dispersed, and the room was empty. The bride had thrown aside all her bouquets but the one which contained me, which she kept pressed in her hands. She left the ball-room, and passed

through the lighted rooms indifferent to their splendour—careless of the fallen flowers which lay beneath her feet. Her step was firm, her eye was clear, her head was held as proudly high as ever. She took a silver candlestick and went to her bedroom, where her maid awaited her. The wreath was taken from her hair; she pulled the diamonds from her breast, and the bracelets from her arms, and threw them without further notice on her table. When she was undressed and her maid had left her, instead of retiring to rest, she stood in the middle of the room, lost in thought. Then she quickly turned to the table on which lay her jewels. Did she wish to rejoice in one more glance at the diamonds in which she had shone? She seized the bouquet. Her fingers trembled as she sought amongst the leaves and flowers. I felt that she sought for me. Then she pulled open the drawer of her toilet-table. In so doing the costly sevigné was shaken to the floor. She heeded it not, but took a pair of scissors and cut the ribbon which bound the bouquet, threw the other flowers aside, took me out, and bent

over me. My head was already drooping, but I felt a hot drop fall into my calyx, and, as I once more looked up, what a change had swept over those features which just before had appeared so cold and proud! The head was bowed. Tears rolled over the cheeks from the beautiful eyes. The whole figure trembled. "Can it be possible that she is not happy?" I asked myself. 'Has she, after all, a heart?" She had thrown herself down on a chair and buried her face in her hands. How long she sat so I do not know, but the lights were nearly burnt out, and daylight streamed through the curtains. It seemed to me as if the shadow of a dark figure passed before the windows. She started, took from the drawer a simple plain locket, and touched the spring. A lock of hair fell out. She pressed me (whom she had been holding all this time in her hand) into the locket. I felt how long she held me to her lips—and died in this kiss.'

Lilli was silent.

'Finished?' said Greycap. 'Your stories always end just where one would think they would begin!'

Instead of an answer, the Elf let the third leaf fall into the stream. Luckily the stars had risen, or else she could not have seen to read to the end of her story, for all the fireflies had fallen fast asleep.

'Lazy little creatures!' said Lilli, and shook the grass, so that the flies started and sparks of fire flew on all sides.

'Truly it is worth the trouble of reading aloud to you!' said the Elf. 'Take care that you are more active;' and she shook them again. 'But, after all, what have you flying stars of the meadows to do with ball-rooms?'

Greycap himself had no answer to this observation.

'Do you know,' asked he, 'why fireflies shine?'

'In order that we elves may see on the nights when the moon does not appear, and the stars are hidden behind the clouds,' was the answer.

Greycap smiled slyly. Something about elfish egotism, which only recognised its own convenience as the great end of creation, trembled on his tongue. He, however, swallowed this remark,

and prepared to lead to a natural-history explanation.

'I did not ask after the end. I inquired after the reason.'

'I know that too,' said Lilli.

Greycap was astonished, and vexed also, for he wished to bring forward a lengthy explanation about phosphorus and the electricity of friction, but Lilli chattered on, not allowing herself to be interrupted.

'The lady-birds had a wedding, and all moths were invited. Many came from a great distance and joined company on the road. It was night, for that is the travelling time of the moths. The butterflies, on the contrary, always take their journeys by day. The travellers were so near their destination that they would have reached it with the first morning's light, when suddenly they came to a great morass, over which burnt and danced here and there several wandering lights. The moths started, paused in their flight, and consulted together how they had best proceed. "We cannot fly over," said the cautious cockchafer. "Those jumping flames would soon

burn our wings." "Then let us fly round the swamp," said the stag-beetle. But the smaller moths would not agree to this, for they were already tired and feared the long flight. "It is all very well for the stag-beetle," said one of them, "with his great wings. We should be soon lost, too, if once we left the straight way." "Let us take one of the dragon-flies for a guide; they know the roads well all about here," proposed the Rose-beetle. But the little moths would hear nothing about a longer way. After much discussion they separated. The larger moths decided to fly round the morass. The smaller ones remained disconsolate by its edge, and much feared they would be too late for the gay wedding. The time went on. A will-o'-the-wisp danced mockingly before them, and the unfortunate company were in despair. At last the fireflies (who were then only ugly little grey moths) said, "We are courageous—we will fly over and see if those flames will destroy us! You remain here, and await the result of our undertaking." And so it was. The tiny grey moths whizzed lightly and cautiously round the

wild, fiery enemy. He leaped towards them. They sprang back terrified, and the lookers-on by the edge already began to triumph over their defeat. But this only animated them to fresh courage. They had now surrounded the will-o'-the-wisp on all sides, and as he (wishing to frighten them) sprang through the thickest group, they loudly rejoiced, for, though their eyes were so dazzled that for a moment they had to close them, yet not one had been injured by the flame. Now they followed the enemy obstinately, and he was soon so surrounded and hemmed in, that he had to surrender himself a prisoner, and was dragged to the shore by the victors in triumph. The other moths now rushed to take part in the victory, and treated the unfortunate captive as their booty, but the little grey warriors knew how to hold the rights they had so bravely fought for. The will-o'-the-wisp was laid on an old stump of a tree. With a long blade of grass, whose edge was furnished with teeth as sharp as a saw, he was cut up and divided, so that each tiny hero received his portion of the spoil, and hid under his wings the

shining fragment of the will-o'-the-wisp. Now the party quickly journeyed on over the marsh, undisturbed by the wandering lights, who, horrified by their brother's fate, had already disappeared. What a triumph the little moths had! for they had arrived a long time at the bride's house, and had already offered their congratulations before the large moths appeared, wearied and exhausted by their long flight, and abusing the Dragon-fly who had first maliciously led them astray and then mockingly left them. When the big moths asked the little ones how they had got over the burning morass, they only hummed and muttered indistinctly in their beards, and nodded slyly with their feelers, for the fireflies had begged them to say nothing about their victory; which they the more willingly acquiesced in, as even moths are apt to be more silent about the good than the evil of their neighbours, and also, when speaking of the courage of the fireflies, they must have admitted their own want of it. The day passed, and on the wedding evening the great festival began. The big moths were rested, and became as boastful as ever. All adorned them-

selves except the fireflies, who sat modestly in their grey dresses on the grass. A gold-beetle, which had been a long time over his toilette, strutted past them, full of pride in his golden mantle, and said, "Poor creatures! truly no ornaments can help you. In those dust-coloured garments you must always cut a sorry figure, otherwise I would offer you the gold dust that I have no use for, and which you will find lying on a blade of grass by the dew-drop which I used for a looking-glass." "We thank you," replied the leader of the fireflies; "although we have not gold dresses, yet we have brought our diamonds with us." At these words they lifted up their wings. The brilliant little flames shone forth, and as they whizzed into the midst of the wedding company the astonishment and wonder had no end. The little flies were the heroes of the feast, and, when it was over, were called upon by Lady-bird, the blushing bride, to light her. That is now long ago, but the fireflies have always since kept their fiery spark. And when it happens to go out, they seek another will-o'-the-wisp and divide it as before.'

'Fooleries!' cried the Heinzelmann, whose patience was quite exhausted; 'pure foolery!'

'No,' said the Elf, very earnestly; 'what I have told you is true and certain, and when next you go through a forest by night you can convince yourself of it. There, in the damp grass, stand often old stumps, which sparkle and shine strangely through the dark. Many imagine that a treasure is buried there, but they would find themselves mistaken if they came to dig for it. On such stumps has a will-o'-the-wisp been cut up, and then it shines for long after. Neither rain nor dew can extinguish this light, because it originates from the damp earth, and so does not fear water. Here is a splinter from such a stump, and I will place it by our side, so that it may enable me to read to you the fourth leaf of the forget-me-not. The stars will also help, so I think I shall manage.'

Before Greycap could say or do anything, Lilli was in full reading. The following is the story of the flower-spirit, which was written on the fourth leaf:—

'I am the last born of a large family. Many

of my sisters had already blossomed and faded. Those who remained had unfolded their last buds, and their bare green stalks, despoiled of their blue crowns, shot up on high naked and unadorned. The sisters had told of the joys of the bright spring and summer; I knew but the chilly, sad days of late autumn, and through the aspens and willows (which shaded the ditch in which I grew) I saw only the fog-veiled sun faintly gleaming, instead of its warm and joyous rays. As far as my eyes could penetrate I saw only faded flowers, bending down into the damp, mossy ground as the wind passed sighingly over them. All the children of spring and summer, which had so boasted in their day of both colour and perfume, now pale and weary, only longed for rest. My flower-eyes wept as I opened them, for I felt the loveliness which I could not understand. The sun had set. Blood-red, undefined, and formless, had the fiery orb disappeared behind the fog, which, wide-spread and undulating, hung damply over the meadows, or wound itself among the trees, who moaningly rustled their branches as if to shake it from

them. I awaited the dreary night, when in the distance I heard the measured tread of footsteps and the sharp ring of metal. Nearer and nearer it came, sounding dull and muffled on the moorland, and I could see the weapons glancing through the mist and twilight. In close, even ranks, like a solid wall, the soldiers advanced so near to the spot where I grew, that, to avoid being crushed by their heavy tread, I squeezed myself behind a stone, over whose edge I curiously peeped. "Halt!" cried the voice of an officer, and the column stood as if rooted to the ground. A few words were passed along the lines, which the wind prevented my hearing distinctly. A small number stepped forward, faced about, moved to the side, and disappeared from my gaze. My ear could not long follow the sound of their steps, for the remaining lines were now full of life and motion. A portion moved further off, and I could with difficulty distinguish the outline of their figures against the grey sky. The rest piled arms, and laid aside their knapsacks. To the stillness of discipline, only broken by the words of command, there followed a busy,

lively confusion of voices, a methodical activity. While some levelled a place close to me, and carried stones together to surround it, others scattered themselves through the hazel copse. Others, again, rolled up their greatcoats, or turned out the contents of their knapsacks. The officers had formed in a circle further off, and I could not distinguish whether orders were given, or only an ordinary conversation carried on. At a short distance the serjeants noted in their tablets the whispered words of an adjutant. All was now again still, but not for long. In the distance was heard the sound of horses' feet and the rattling of swords. Soon a squadron of hussars rode up at a quick trot. They halted and dismounted. Stakes were driven into the ground, to which the horses were fastened, and all were soon in full activity. I could not well observe all that took place, for it was now quite dark; and also what passed in my immediate neighbourhood occupied all my attention. The soldiers returned from the hazel copse laden with large fagots, which they piled in the place already surrounded by stones. Here they

lighted a fire, which first rose in heavy volumes of smoke through the heavy fog, and then burst into flames, scattering the glowing sparks far and wide through the now broken darkness. It was a cold, damp night, raindrops fell, and the howling wind drove the smoke of the encampers' fire in a dense cloud on one side. All were now settled, and a noisy, reckless conversation began, mixed with many a rough jest, rewarded with a chorus of loud laughter from the numerous listeners. The flasks were passed round. Here and there a fragment of a soldier-song was begun, but quickly drowned in bursts of applause. The trumpeter stood on one side and sounded his calls. The officers sat laughing and joking round the fire, or in small circles discussed the events of the day. It was a picture full of life and variety! The many groups,—now strongly lighted by the blazing fire, now veiled in smoke and shadow,—the various uniforms, the background of glittering weapons piled together, and the horses, which, with their heads turned away from the fire, with great diligence emptied their

fodder-bags. Gradually it became quieter by the fire, as one by one the officers dropped away, and, wrapped in their cloaks, or protected by the trunk of a tree or the bank of the ditch, fell asleep. The fire had burnt low, the rain had ceased. One heard only the measured steps of the sentries, or from far, through the darkness, the calls of the patrols. Close to me sat, in deep and earnest conversation, a lieutenant of infantry with a doctor of hussars. They had met by the fire, and had greeted each other as old friends who had been long separated. The lieutenant sat on the stone behind which I was hidden; the doctor lay at his feet on a woollen rug—I could see them both plainly. The doctor looked bright and contented; the face of the officer, though gladdened by the pleasure of the meeting and the lively conversation, yet bore the traces of a deep sorrow. They recalled all the old times when they had studied together at Heidelberg. Merry hours were again lived over, and many names mutually inquired after; members of that happy circle now, by their different fates, so widely separated. They

remarked on their own strange meeting, just on the eve of a probable battle, and both in circumstances which they had never anticipated. The serious service of war recalled to their thoughts the mimic warfare of their student years, and smiling they thought of each victory and defeat. The doctor suddenly asked the lieutenant what had made him determine to devote himself to a military life. Then a deeper cloud overshadowed the face of the soldier. He evaded the answer, and both looked down silently. A cry—a confusion of voices—startled them from this silence. A pile of arms had fallen, and the noise, with the reflection of the fire on the falling weapons, had made a horse shy. It had broken loose, and severely kicked the hussar who had caught it. The doctor was called for, and quickly left his friend, who remained alone. Long he sat, lost in thought. I felt as if I understood him. The glad remembrances of happy years carried him back to days whose memories he kept locked in his heart. At last he woke from his dream, shook the hair from his forehead, as if he would also shake off

the sorrow which weighed on his heart, and pulled out his watch to wind it up. In doing so the chain broke, and a ring fell off it to the ground. He bent down, and, aided by the glimmering spark of his cigar, sought it among the grass and flowers. The ring hung on my stalk, and in taking it up he broke the stem and raised me also to the light. "A forget-me-not!" said he; "how chance has thrown it into my hands! Strange!—again a forget-me-not! I will take it as an omen for me in the coming battle." He stuck me in a button-hole, wrapped himself in his greatcoat, and lay down on the ground to sleep. There I lay on a beating human heart. How it heaved and palpitated! Ah, what was not hidden in its memories! I listened and followed each pulse-beat as the sleeper's dreams caused it to beat louder or softer—wilder or more tranquilly. The morning broke, and the fog slowly rolled away, blown partly by a cutting wind. One could already see the sun—the sun of a fatal day. The drums awakened the sleepers; the trumpet called the hussars to horse. Quickly they all stood, rested and armed, ordered and

arranged, as on their arrival the previous evening. March! and forward stepped the soldiers, and I with them, lying on the heart of my bearer. Soon we reached a good road, and then we went quicker; but still with measured, even steps, till we came to a height, where a halt was called. I could see a wide plain. Separated from us by a foreground of bushes was a long wall, behind which lay a village, sheltered by a wooded hill. Wall and village were occupied by the enemy. Before the bushy ground which separated us, a broad line of battle was formed. The troops with whom I had come were on the right wing. "Third company to the front!" was the word of command, and the officer whose button-hole I adorned placed himself with his men. The battle had already begun on the left wing, and we stood long silently waiting. From the heights thundered the enemy's batteries, and an attack on ours had been twice repulsed. Then came the command for us to advance, and drive the enemy from the wall. Coolly and calmly the eye of my officer mustered his men, and clearly

rang out his words of command. His glance was unmoved, his step was firm, nothing betrayed the slightest internal agitation. I alone could guess it; I alone felt the wild pulsation of his heart. Was it the excitement of battle?—or was it a presentiment of death—the parting from life and the loved ones, which so agitated his breast? I knew not. We had advanced a few steps, when we were greeted by a deadly fire from the enemy. Many gaps were in our ranks, but "Forward!" was the cry, the example of our leader. The wall was reached and scaled, but our ranks were now very thin. The officer reformed his line, and again led on to the charge. Now I could not only hear, but understand the heart's throbbings. It beat so wildly, not because it feared death, but because it sought it! The attack was repulsed; we rallied, and charged again; death beckoned to us from countless fiery throats. I trembled—for myself and for him. Then a bullet pierced deep into the breast of my brave wearer, carrying me with it into the bleeding wound. One sigh, and all was still. The heart beat

no more in joy or sorrow I died in his heart's blood!'

The fourth leaf followed the others. It hung on a stone before it reached the stream. A dewdrop rolled from the grass and washed it down.

Lilli had something to do to her eyes with her hand, and, as the Heinzelmann sympathetically tried to ask what ailed her, she began abusing the stars for shining so dimly, and said it was very unwise to try to read by such a bad light. That was exactly what Greycap had said, and he tried to remind her that he had been right; but she would not allow it, and altered her tone and said that, though she could not praise the starlight, yet the reading could not hurt her, and, as a proof, prepared to read the fifth leaf, which she held in her hand.

Greycap saw he could gain nothing by sensible reasons, so he submitted to his friend's caprices, and resigned himself to the reading.

But this time Lilli studied with embarrassment her leaf, and Greycap could not conceal a look of pleasure at her discomfiture, as she began,—

'Something must have flown into my eye, for here I have torn away part of my last leaf: half of the story is lost.'

'Well, then, we will leave it,' said Greycap, and tried to rise up from his place.

'We will do nothing of the kind,' said Lilli, and held him firmly; 'I must read my book to the end; and you, as you are so wise and have read so much, and understand the ways of men, can fill up and guess what fails. We are just in the middle—from here nothing is missing—so listen:—

'The maiden stood at the window and held me in her hand. She passed her other hand over her forehead and eyes, and looked far into the distance. I followed her glance. Along the road through the valley galloped a horseman; he it was——'

'Lilli!' cried Greycap, 'what sense can one make of such a story? Who is the maiden? how came the forget-me-not in her hand? who is *he?* All that we have not been told.'

Lilli was determined to decipher the fragment of leaf to the very end.

'Dear friend,' said she, 'do not interrupt me. What does it mean? A maiden to whom, as I think, a young man has given a forget-me-not. He has just ridden away, and she is looking after him. The continuation will prove if I am right. Listen further:—

'As he disappeared in the distance she left the window. It seemed as if she had controlled her tears, in order to watch him as long as possible. Now she stood in the middle of the room, and floods of tears streamed down her cheeks. Then she smiled through her weeping, pressed me to her lips, and murmured, "Can it really be true? is it possible?—he loves me!" As she crossed the room, her step was prouder, and wondrous joy beamed from her eyes. She stood before the glass, and gazed anxiously on her own features, as if they were become precious to her now that she was loved. Then she saw with surprise the traces of tears in her eyes. "Tears," said she; "and in my whole life I have never been so happy as in this moment!" and she laughed, and wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, but each time the tears burst

forth afresh, and rolled down her cheeks in diamond drops. At last she became calmer, and as she walked up and down the room her thoughts, at first overpowered by the one feeling, returned to other considerations. She stood still suddenly. "My grandmother," said she, "will never consent, and I can never confess it to her!" It seemed as if the blood froze in her veins, she stood so pale; as if her tears were sealed, so fixed were her eyes. She heard steps approaching, started, and, flying to the work-table, seized the first piece of embroidery, and looked steadily down. I fell out of her hand, and lay upon the table.

'The door opened, and with a firm, decided step, a tall matron entered. Her upright bearing, despite of her advanced age—her searching eye, shadowed by the snow-white hair—the expression of her firmly-closed lips—all denoted hardness and inflexibility. Her face was a book, on which life had written stern lessons. I saw with trembling the look with which she greeted her grandchild, who bent her head still lower. Those eyes had long ago forgotten how to weep.

'The features of the matron never changed as she scrutinised silently the face of her grandchild; but, in the downcast looks of the lovely girl, she read as in an open book.

'"You have been crying," said she: "he is gone—you love him!" The poor child had not dared to confess her precious secret, but how could she deny it?—this the holiest, deepest feeling of her heart! She answered only by fresh tears. The grandmother began to speak in a gentler tone,—"This is, perhaps, the first struggle of your life, but they who live must learn to struggle with the world and with their hearts—you must forget him!" The girl's heart wrestled violently. "Forget!" murmured she; "no, never, never!" "Child," said the grandmother, "what must one not overcome in life? what must one not forget?" The grandchild shook her head; the feeling newly awakened in her was too powerful to be shaken even by the white-haired experience of a long life. "Has he told you?—what did he say in taking leave?" asked the aged lady. "Nothing," replied the girl; "nothing; but I knew it all from his last look,

from the lingering pressure of his hand, in the trembling adieu with which he gave me these flowers." She laid down her work, and picked up her forget-me-nots. "Forget-me-nots!" said the matron: "a forget-me-not!" She sank in an arm-chair, and gazed long and silently on the flower before her; but her expression became softer, something moved this hard breast, her thoughts flew back the dreary space of a long, long past. Her grandchild stood before her, half in astonishment, half in fear. She had never seen her so before, and waited for the opening of those lips as if for a judge's sentence. "Go to that cabinet," said the grandmother, and the girl obeyed. "Open the bottom drawer—not that —the left one. Look under those letters! Do you see a small, plain gold locket? That is it. Bring it here, my child." The grandmother held the locket in her thin, withered hands, and pressed a spring. It opened, and in it lay a yellow, faded forget-me-not. "You love," said she; "oh, you are happy!" And tears gathered in her eyes, and fell on to the poor withered forget-me-not in her hand. The girl had never

seen her grandmother weep before; it was as if a wall of separation was broken down, as if the ice had melted from the aged heart. She sank at her feet, and, astonished at the never-before-suspected secret, she exclaimed,—"You have loved! Oh, grandmother, you, too, have loved!" The grandmother raised and kissed her. "He shall have you, child," said she; "*you* shall be happy." The girl threw her arms round the aged woman's neck, and I fell from her hand. At last the grandmother arose, shut the locket, and carefully replaced it whence it had been taken. I was forgotten, and withered on the floor. Love wants no reminders.'

The last leaf fell into the stream, and Lilli got up. The breaking day already coloured the horizon with its rosy glow. Grass and flowers looked up, as the dew-drops rolled from them.

'You must drink your morning draught,' said the Elf; 'and I, who have chattered the whole night to you, must away and see what the other elves are about. Let us go.'

Greycap rose, and gave his hand to his

friend to assist her from the stone into the meadow.

'Take care of yourself,' said he, 'and don't crush those forget-me-nots at your feet.'

Lilli smiled, and disappeared without further adieu. He stepped slowly forward, picking his way, so as not to hurt the blue blossoms.

THE END.

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